COLLECTED WORKS OF ERASMUS

VOLUME 65

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COLLECTED WORKS OF ERASMUS

EXPOSITIONS OF THE PSALMS

edited by Dominic Baker-Smith

ENARRATIO PSALMI 38

DE SARCIENDA ECCLESIAE CONCORDIA

ENARRATIO PSALMI 14
QUI EST DE PURITATE TABERNACULI SIVE ECCLESIAE CHRISTIANAE

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Introduction

The full range and the implications of Erasmus' engagement with the Psalms are discussed in the Introduction to CWE 63. The three works contained in this third and final volume of his expositions of the Psalms date from the closing years of his career, a time when in spite of age his creative energies showed no signs of flagging and could still rise to the remarkable achievement of the *Ecclesiastes* in 1535. The dedication of *Enarratio psalmi 38* to Bishop Stanislaus Thurzo was written in February 1532, and the *De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia*, an exposition of Psalm 83, was dedicated to Julius Pflug at the end of July 1533. Both these works were composed while Erasmus was

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Works cited frequently are referred to in the notes in abbreviated form; a list of abbreviations and full bibliographical information will be found on 270–1 below. References to Erasmus' correspondence are to the English translation of the letters in CWE, where these have already been published, or to the Latin edition of Allen.

The following shortened titles are adopted for individual expositions of the Psalms:
Enarratio allegorica primi psalmi: In psalmum 1
Commentarius in psalmum 2: In psalmum 2
Paraphrasis in tertium psalmum: In psalmum 3
In psalmum quartum concio: In psalmum 4
Concionalis interpretatio in psalmum 85: In psalmum 85
In psalmum 22 enarratio triplex: In psalmum 22
Consultatio de bello Turcis inferendo, et obiter enarratus psalmus 28: De bello Turcico
Enarratio psalmi 33: In psalmum 33
Enarratio psalmi 38: In psalmum 38
De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia [on Psalm 83]: *De concordia*
Enarratio psalmi 14 qui est de puritate tabernaculi sive ecclesiae christianae: De puritate tabernaculi

still resident in Freiburg. His final work of biblical commentary, the *Enarratio psalmi 14 qui est de puritate tabernaculi*, dedicated to Christoph Eschenfelder, followed Erasmus' return to Basel in May 1535 and was published early in the following year, less than six months before his death. These three works represent his final thoughts on the great crisis facing western Christendom, but they are thoughts which have to be understood within a particular phase of the response to the Reformation.

The period between the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 and the failure of the Diet of Regensburg in 1541 is marked by a quest for some kind of accommodation, for the staking out of the middle ground in which constructive debate could be attempted. It is a phase which can reasonably be labelled 'political' in that it is motivated by the need to find a modus vivendi by which the conflicting groups might coexist, especially within the Empire.[1] This no doubt explains why it is that of the three works in this volume the two that found the widest contemporary dissemination were the two whose titles pointed most directly to their ecclesiological concerns, the *De concordia* and the *De puritate tabernaculi*. Both appeared in English translation within a few years, the latter anonymously as *An exposicyon of the XV psalme* printed by John Wayland in 1537 and the former in 1545 in a version by Richard Taverner which is now lost.[2] Both these translations were clearly part of a publishing strategy, initiated by Thomas Cromwell, to lure readers away from conservative piety into that middle position which might in time ease their acceptance of more radical policies. In fact a prominent feature of these three psalm commentaries, and of their wider context, is the sense of what can best be termed an interim mentality, that is to say, one which seeks to establish an atmosphere of restraint and even tolerance in which differences might be discussed and resolutions sought, prior to the final ruling of some appropriate authority. Erasmus puts the idea clearly at the conclusion of the *De concordia*: 'My aim in these suggestions has not been to put forward my remarks as possessing certain truth, nor to anticipate the decisions of the church, but rather that in the interim before a

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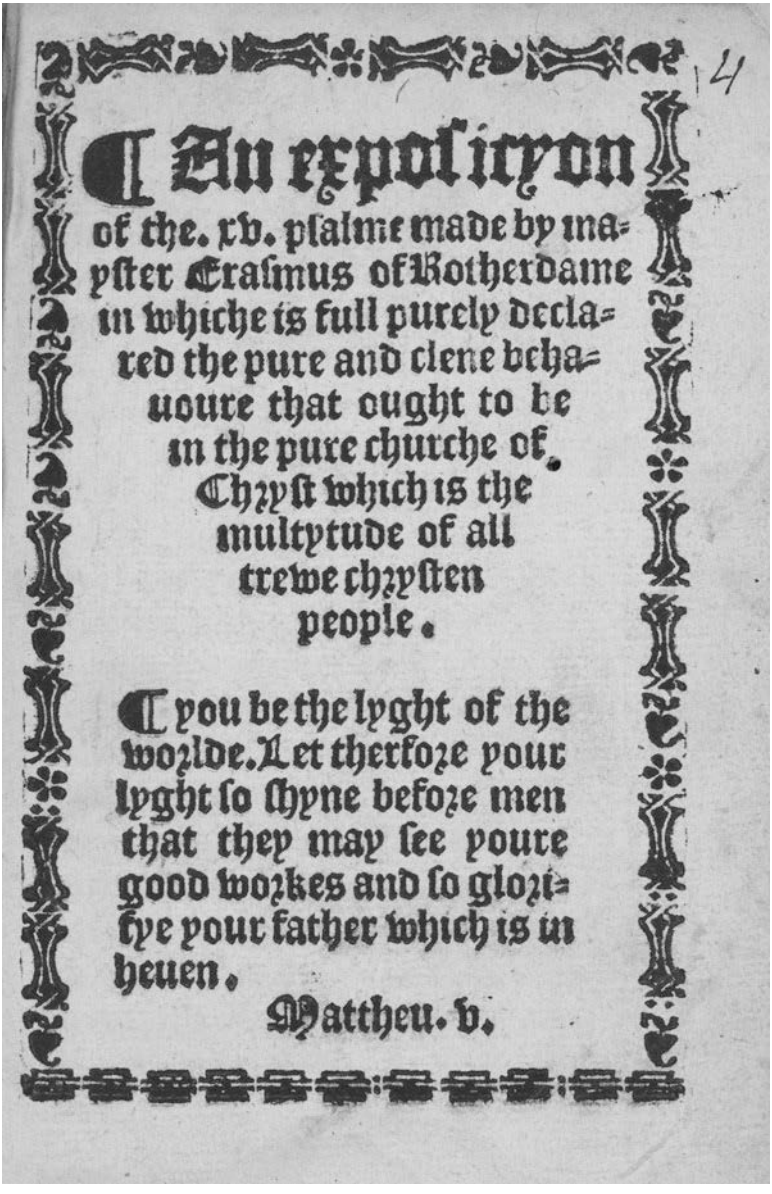
1 David Bagchi 'Catholic theologians of the Reformation period before Trent' in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformation Theology* ed D. Bagchi and D. Steinmetz (Cambridge 2004) 222; as an instructive example see P.G. Bietenholz 'Concordia Christiana: Erasmus' Thought and the Polish Reality' ERSY 21 (2001) 44–70.

2 They are described in E.J. Devereux *Renaissance English Translations of Erasmus* (Toronto 1983).


4
¶ An exposicyon
of the. xv. psalme made by ma-
yster Erasmus of Rotherdame
in whiche is full purely decla-
red the pure and clene beha-
uoure that ought to be
in the pure churche of
Chryst which is the
multytude of all
trewe chrysten
people.
¶ you be the lyght of the
worlde. Let therfore your
lyght so shyne before men
that they may see youre
good workes and so glori-
fye your father which is in
heuen.
Mattheu. v.

Title-page of *An exposicyon of the XV psalme*,
an anonymous translation into English of *De puritate tabernaculi*
published by John Wayland (London 1537)
Cambridge University Library, University of Cambridge. Syn.8.53.47

council is summoned, we may ourselves, as far as we can, remove all causes of dissent.'[3]

In his *History of the Council of Trent* Hubert Jedin, who has little time for Erasmus, refers to 'the great delusion' that some kind of reconciliation between the parties might be possible. But at the time, and without the benefit of hindsight, it clearly struck many as a viable option, even a social necessity. After all, Jedin himself concedes that only the failure of the discussions at the Colloquy of Regensburg in 1541, the last throw of the moderates, 'could justify the drawing of the Tridentine line of demarcation.'[4] It was the failure of the 'political' efforts at accommodation that left the way open to theological intransigence. Equally it must be said that Erasmus and other moderate figures like Gasparo Contarini and Jacopo Sadoleto failed to appreciate that behind the literal expression of conciliatory formulations there might lurk a very divergent spirit.

In a letter to Claudius Cantiuncula in 1525, responding to Cantiuncula's appeal that he write against Johannes Oecolampadius, Erasmus observes that the 'conflagration' has been out of control for a long time now: 'both sides are attacking each other like gladiators and each is racked by internal conflict.'[5] This image of the battling gladiators is one that appealed to Erasmus, and he uses it again when writing to Julius Pflug, the dedicatee of the *De concordia*. Part of the attraction is that he can cast himself somewhat melodramatically in the role of the simple monk in the *Historia tripertita* who tried to halt such a conflict and was killed for his pains.[6] His assessment is not an encouraging one but he does hold out two possibilities; one is an 'ecumenical synod,' that is a council, and the other a committee of one hundred or fifty theologians, noted for holiness of life and learning and drawn from the various nations. The vagueness about the numbers suggests that the proposal is rather half-hearted, and in any case there was as yet little sign of papal commitment to a council.[7] But did Erasmus really want final and definitive rulings on all the points at issue? Certainly he was anxious to avoid such civil disorder as had driven him from Basel in April 1529 and he deplored theological con-

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3 See 213 below.
4 Jedin I 391
5 Ep 1616
6 Allen Ep 2522:167–77; for other gladiatorial references see Ep 1674:29–31; Ep 1675:34–6; Ep 1678:28–31; Ep 1687:35–41; Ep 1707:33–4; Ep 1734:26.
7 Allen Ep 2522:22–34; the Bull summoning a general council to Mantua was issued on 2 June 1536, just over a month after the death of Erasmus.

frontation. But there are hints that the interim phase had its attractions for him.

As an example there is the discussion of confession in the *De concordia*, a topic earlier explored in the *Exomologesis*. The issue under debate is the divine institution of the sacrament, and Erasmus seeks to defuse the confrontation by giving prominence to the subjective factor which is necessary to its effective working. Scrupulosity, with its undue reliance on the outward form as an escape from guilt, is dismissed; instead, at the heart of the sacrament should be genuine sorrow for sin, conveyed to God in prayer. The value of confession, then, lies in the way it focuses the conscience and generates contrition.[8] Erasmus recommends the practice, especially if a wise confessor can be found, but he falls short of making it a defining issue of Catholic identity; instead he urges those on either side to respect each other's views 'until a sacred council makes some more explicit pronouncement on the matter.'[9] Confession is an interesting case since the obvious requirement of an appropriate disposition in the penitent might seem to reduce the importance of the formal act: it draws away from the concept of the sacrament as efficacious *ex opere operato* – that is through the proper observance of the ritual – to stress instead the contribution of the subject *ex opere operantis* – through the action of the agent. The voluntarist tradition deriving from Duns Scotus had given attention to the possibility of extra-sacramental justification based on attrition, imperfect sorrow inspired by fear but of sufficient intensity to merit grace *de congruo*.[10] In such a context the subjective experience is given novel status and the institutional form yields ground to it.

By the time he came to write the *Hyperaspistes* Erasmus was extremely chary about giving too much scope to human freedom: as he wrote to Thomas More, 'If I follow Paul and Augustine there is very little that they leave to free will.' Consequently he distances himself from the view of the Scotists with its optimistic rating of natural powers in the process of justification, while nonetheless admitting that he finds this view 'not

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8 'Confession thus effects not a sacramental but a psychological change in us' Payne 194.

9 See 206 below; see also the colloquy *Confabulatio pia* CWE 39 97 and n53.

10 A.E. McGrath *Justitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* 2nd ed (Cambridge 1998) 96–100. As distinct from acts in a state of grace which may be allowed merit *de condigno*, acts which precede justification but prepare the way for it may be accepted as meritorious *de congruo* on the basis of God's loving kindness in the individual case. This pastoral emphasis tends to play down the institutional dimension.

unattractive.'[11] But for him this did not exclude human cooperation with God or rule out the part played by subjective response in the dynamics of this relationship. The imposing edifice of the *Ecclesiastes* was constructed precisely to confirm the moving power of rhetoric in the service of the gospel: the trend towards spiritual subjectivity which Erasmus could have encountered in late scholastic ideas on the working of grace cohered with the persuasive intent of rhetoric. Erasmus' concept of the theologian is one of many Renaissance variants on Cicero's ideal orator, not least because he is more concerned with the affections than with arguments since it is through the affections or inner feelings that an encounter with God is made possible.[12] Outward acts of worship are vain 'if the silent and reverent love for God [*tacitus ille pietatis affectus in Deum*] is not present; this is the song that is most pleasing to God even if no sound of words accompanies it.'[13]

The distinction between outward acts and inner disposition or *affectus* lies at the heart of Erasmus' critique of contemporary religious practice, from the early days of the *Enchiridion* down to these final expositions of the psalms. The 'song' of Idythun in Psalm 38 is not something 'uttered in a loud voice,' but rather something uttered 'with a powerful inner feeling.' The term used here, *affectus*, is one that Erasmus adopts frequently to convey the idea of the subjective self, the animating power that lends validity to any religious act. Hence, the cry of the lowly which reaches up to God is not 'the sound produced in the body by a powerful breath' but instead 'an ardent stirring of the soul.'[14] In a variation on the theme in the same work the emotions become the feet of the soul, enabling it to leap up the mountains of the spirit, and this is echoed in the *De concordia* where the hill of Sion is ascended 'through the emotions and not by the feet; with the heart, not with steps.'[15] In contrast to the late medieval heritage of public enactment and ceremony Erasmus introduces a concept of personal response derived from humanist rhetoric: the affections are the target at which the orator must direct his art. Thus in the account of the mass in the *De concordia* Erasmus lays emphasis on a direct encounter with Christ in the sacrament, dismissing the various modes of external piety that distort this encounter:

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11 Allen 1804:91–5: 'mihi non displiceret opinio'; see also CWE 76 lxxxii and n169.
12 For the theologian see *Ratio* in Holborn 187:17–18, 193:1922; also see the *Paraclesis* in Holborn 143:3–10, 144:35–145:1.
13 *Modus orandi Deum* CWE 70 149
14 See 11, 112 below. On *affectus* see D. Baker-Smith 'Affectivity and Irenicism' ERSY 26 (2006) 29–42.
15 See 181, 182–3 below.

'Christ is present in the sacrament in the form of food and drink so that he may be consumed with absolute purity of mind, and not in order to be exhibited, or carried about at celebrations and public processions, or borne about fields on horseback.'[16] Clearly, it is the intimacy of this encounter that Erasmus wishes to preserve, one that is entered on 'with absolute purity of mind'; while he has no wish to deny the material element, he grounds the value of a religious act in its subjective impact; it is this that lends meaning to the visible performance.[17] For its part the latter offers participation in tradition, the shared experience which unites the body of Christ. Such a carefully poised position seems to lie behind the guarded letter Erasmus addressed to the town council of Basel about Oecolampadius' symbolic interpretation of the Eucharist; this he rates as 'pious, if anything could be so described which is at variance with the general opinion of the church, from which I consider it perilous to dissent.'[18] While he can appreciate Oecolampadius' stress on spiritual encounter in the sacrament, Erasmus' respect for received tradition means that he cannot reduce the bread and wine to mere symbols.

There is, in fact, a fine balance in the way Erasmus relates personal appropriation to institutional forms, and this has important implications for his response to the Reformers. As an example there is his treatment of free will in the *De concordia*, 'a controversy more productive of thorns than fruit,' as he wryly observes. The topic had engaged his attention in the *De libero arbitrio* and was taken further in the two parts of the *Hyperaspistes*, where he argues exhaustively against Luther's claim that free will is a 'thing consisting of a name alone.'[19] But he argues with characteristic moderation, endeavouring both to restrict human freedom to a minimal role and at the same time to preserve its essential acquiescence to the workings of grace.[20] In the *De concordia* he is happy to leave the technical refinements to theological colloquies, but in the meantime – the pre-conciliar

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16 See 210 below.

17 See 32 below: 'Not even the music which a Christian produces is pleasing to God unless the whole man is in harmony with himself and the outer man accords with the inner.' Cf CWE 64 47.

18 Ep 1636

19 *On the Bondage of the Will* trans J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (Edinburgh 1957) 271

20 '[The effort of our will] is tiny, but God takes it in good part, however small; and beyond it you can contribute nothing, but still it is so important that unless it is there the grace of God would be in vain for you': *Hyperaspistes* book 2 CWE 77 439

interim – it is enough for the parties to agree 'that man can do nothing of his own resources, and that if he is able to accomplish anything whatsoever, he owes it all to the grace of Him by whose gift we are whatever we are; so that in all things we may acknowledge our weakness and glorify the mercy of the Lord.'[21] We have already seen the cautious note he sounded to More about the restrictive views of Paul and Augustine: 'there is very little they leave to free will.' But his point is that there is *something* left, however miniscule, without which grace will not operate. When he does seem to approach the language of solafideism, it is as a rhetorical device to highlight the gratuitous character of God's relationship with humanity rather than as a consequence of human depravity: Luther, he complains, makes little distinction between mankind and Satan. The *De libero arbitrio* puts the matter vividly: 'I favour the opinion of those who attribute something to free will but most to grace. For you must not give so wide a berth to the Scylla of arrogance that you are driven towards the Charybdis of despair or indolence.'[22] The contrast here is between an inappropriate stress on merit and an exaggerated solafideism, and what stands out is Erasmus' concern with the kinds of subjective attitude promoted by the contrasted views. Not surprisingly, the skilful lyre player or *citharoedus* in Psalm 38 is the one who can reconcile faith and works without distorting the role of either.[23] One could almost say that Erasmus' approach to the issue is apophatic: the dogmatic extremes are dismissed and we are left with a median point defined by affective response rather than precise verbal formulation. There is that acknowledgment of received tradition in the recognition of a miniscule human role, but the overwhelming reality is God's gratuitous forgiveness, the basis for spiritual reassurance and tranquillity of spirit.[24]

Erasmus' attempt to accommodate apparently opposed views by appealing to a shared affective response is very clear in the *De concordia*. He can argue on the one hand that God *in a sense* makes himself our debtor by undertaking to fulfil his promises; it is a kind of justice to discharge those undertakings which you have freely promised. This can be taken as a gesture in the direction of merits, but so expressed that it brings us back to

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21 See 202 below. The term that he adopts here, *diatriba*, 'a learned discussion,' is the title of his first work against Luther; for its implications see M. O'Rourke Boyle *Rhetoric and Reform: Erasmus' Civil Dispute with Luther* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983).

22 CWE 76 86

23 See 32 below.

24 Cf the dismissal of classical *tranquillitas* 168–9 below.

the base note of gratitude for divine mercy. On the other hand, however, faced by quite contrary views – 'the quality of our works has no significance, only have faith and you will be saved,' or, 'whatever man's deeds he can do nothing but sin' – he can allow that these are *in a sense* true, though they should not be discussed in front of the ignorant. The common reality behind these apparently disparate statements is the generosity of a God who 'accepts and reckons up in his goodness whatever he works in us or through us.'[25] In this Erasmus is typical of those, like Cardinal Contarini, the papal legate at Regensburg, who remained within Catholic ranks while responding to the language of justification by faith. It is certainly no accident that so many in this category were humanist trained, bringing to theological discussion a rhetorician's alertness to the subjective resonances of language.

One of the most arresting sections of *In psalmum 38* is concerned with the fluidity of doctrine in the early church. This was a topic that Erasmus had introduced a year earlier in the exposition of Psalm 33; there he raised the question, how could men be accepted as saints who had clearly lapsed from orthodox doctrine? The answer, of course, lay in their inward attitude: while circumstances may have led them to adopt erroneous opinions, at heart they remained at one with the church. These are instances of what Erasmus refers to as 'merely intellectual' errors which are soon amended. The real issue concerns that inner disposition which directs our attitude towards authority: 'those whose error is a merely intellectual one and whose emotions have not been seduced are easily brought back to the path.'[26] Orthodoxy is thus a matter of inward allegiance rather than conformity to a checklist of dogmatic formulations.

The theme of patristic fallibility which Erasmus surveys at some length in his exposition of Psalm 38 also surfaces in another work of the same year, the *Explanatio symboli*. There the Catechist explains that only the canonical Scriptures can claim irrefutable authority; virtually all the Fathers deviate from truth at some point, but this does not compromise their standing as holy and learned witnesses – 'not every error makes a man a heretic.'[27] In the case of *In psalmum 38* Erasmus provides an extensive list of patris-

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25 See 202 below.

26 CWE 64 368

27 CWE 70 331–2; this invites comparison with Thomas Starkey's assertion, written with Luther in mind and at much the same time, that 'heretykys be not in al thyngys heretykys': *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* ed T.F. Mayer (London 1989) 90.

tic errors before moving on to expose contradictions in papal and conciliar teaching.[28] The fact is that human judgment is fallible and consequently no one in the history of the church has been wholly free from some degree of error; once that is recognized, then 'merely intellectual' error ceases to constitute such a threat to orthodox belief, provided that a spirit of concord and accommodation prevails. The era of the Fathers, as Erasmus exposes their lapses from approved doctrine, takes on something of the character of his own pre-conciliar interim: in time definitive rulings may emerge but in the meanwhile it would be as well to avoid divisive assertions. This is one reason why Erasmus is reserved about martyrdom: in the current situation it can only serve to harden the confessional boundaries.[29]

Erasmus' attitude towards the relative fluidity of patristic dogma is expressed succinctly in the preface to his edition of St Hilary: 'God has willed that the happy state of freedom from error be reserved for the sacred books alone. Everyone else, however learned and keen-sighted he may be, on occasion stumbles and gropes blindly. Obviously therefore all remember that they are humans and as humans they are read by us, with discrimination, with judgment, and at the same time with indulgence.'[30] This moderate scepticism takes us to the heart of Erasmus' humanism, based as it is on the axioms of the rhetorical tradition. Scripture apart, human intelligence strains to grasp sacred truths and human language struggles to express them. In these conditions doctrine, supported by the witness of outstanding teachers and the consensus of the faithful over generations, can present a persuasive level of probability. What Erasmus is trying to do, most notably in the *De concordia*, is to encourage an atmosphere of charitable accommodation in which probabilities can be calmly weighed and tested. Heresy in such circumstances is less the assertion of intellectual error than the malicious rupturing of the hermeneutic community; indeed, Erasmus is even prepared to argue that it is better to remain in impurity within the church than to leave it for heresy or schism.[31]

The spirit of accommodation is expressed memorably in the *De concordia* by the Greek term *synkatabasis*, best translated as 'condescension.' In this sense it conveys the surrender of advantage in order to meet a weaker

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28 See 42–53 below.

29 On martyrdom see Ep 1384; also Brad S. Gregory *Salvation at Stake* (Cambridge, Mass 1999) 262–3, 321.

30 Ep 1334:92–6; for his appeal to patristic fallibility see Irena Backus 'Erasmus and the Spirituality of the Early Church' in Pabel *Erasmus' Vision* 95–114.

31 See 197 below.

party on equal terms, and so could be applied to the condescension of the emperor to his subjects or, more fittingly in this case, to Christ's renunciation of his divine attributes at the Incarnation, 'the awesome condescension of God in stooping to identify himself with the abject poverty of the human condition.'[32] It was in this latter sense that *synkatabasis* was adopted by the Greek Fathers. Implicit in the term is the spirit of generosity and benevolence, but it suggests as well the idea of self-exposure. It thus expresses the opposite extreme to the kind of exclusive confessional assertion that increasingly dominates exchanges between Rome and the reformed churches in the course of the 1530s. Not surprisingly, Erasmus uses it with a note of caution: concessions may be made but they cannot extend to 'those things handed down to us by the authority of our forebears and established by the usage and agreement of many centuries.'[33] But it is clear from the examples which he provides that his main concern is to reduce the degree of antagonism between the parties so that some allowance can be made for the sincerity of an alternative viewpoint. This is particularly clear in the case of those traditional practices such as invocation of the saints, the use of images, and prayers for the dead which might seem to jar with even a mildly reformist outlook. Erasmus' intention is to lower tensions as a prelude to the anticipated council: 'if a spirit of moderation and compromise (*synkatabasis*) soothes the bitterness of our quarrels, then the medicine applied by a council will more easily bring about agreement.'[34] That mention of medicine is worth noting as it would seem to suggest that Erasmus looked to a council for rather more than just dogmatic rulings.

The Enlightenment was largely responsible for casting Erasmus as the apostle of toleration, a view that recent scholarship has tended to qualify. While he was instinctively opposed to violence of any sort, whether military or intellectual, the indications are that he would accept the use of force where there was a danger of sedition. What he does recognize is that in spiritual matters consent can be won only through persuasion.[35] Hence the importance of dialogue in the *De concordia*: what Erasmus hopes for is a spirit of concord based on common membership of the mystical body of

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32 Peter Brown *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (Madison 1992) 156

33 See 201 below; such things are *akineta* 'unmovable,' in contrast to *adiaphora* 'indifferent matters.'

34 See 213 below.

35 Eg: 'But it is much easier to compel by force than to persuade by words; it is less demanding to kill the body than to convert the will to good actions' *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-4 172:771–9.

Christ. It is this Pauline sense of a corporate harmony that governs Erasmus' long-term view of the church. Consequently the reconciliation of differing views presupposes a period of mutual toleration when these can be voiced and tested. But the question then arises, for how long? While toleration is seen in modern terms as a positive virtue, one which allows different views or creeds to run on parallel lines into an indefinite future, to the sixteenth-century mind the lines were expected to converge. *Tolerare*, after all, connoted supporting or putting up with a burden.[36] This anticipation of eventual convergence has been aptly described by Mario Turchetti as 'une tolérance provisoire': it implies an interim phase, one of condescension, in the course of which key issues of difference might be creatively explored, very much in the manner attempted five years after Erasmus' death at the Colloquy of Regensburg.[37] Moreover, it is taken as axiomatic that the received doctrines of Christian tradition will be maintained: for instance, in the case of the Eucharist it must be accepted that the actual body and blood of Christ are present in the sacrament, but 'the manner of presence ... can be settled by a council.'[38] Such an attitude may better be described as irenical rather than tolerant since it aims to assist the eventual emergence of an acceptable formulation of truth, and a necessary precondition for this emergence must be conversion of the heart.[39] It is not surprising, then, that some have seen Erasmus' gestures towards religious dialogue as half-hearted, betraying his failure to engage imaginatively with the challenges presented by reformed theology.[40] On his behalf it can be argued that there is a marked consistency between the spiritual criticism of church practices in the *Enchiridion* and the spiritual assessment of controverted points in the writings of the 1530s. By directing attention to the inner consciousness of a religious act Erasmus is able to reduce its confessional stamp, presenting it as something akin to neutral territory. An example would be the case just cited, that of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist: provided that the communicant is subjectively persuaded of the real presence then the explanation of how this occurs is a relatively low

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36 R.C. Head 'The Transformations of the Long Sixteenth Century' in *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration before the Enlightenment* ed J.C. Lauren and C.J. Nederman (Philadelphia 1998) 95–106

37 Turchetti, 'Une question mal posée'

38 See 211 below.

39 There is a parallel here with Erasmus' approach to the conversion of the Turks in the *De bello turcico* CWE 64 242.

40 For such a critical view of the *De concordia* see Peter Matheson *The Rhetoric of the Reformation* (Edinburgh 1998) chapter 8.

priority, something that can be left to expert discussion. The kind of internalization of religious values that Erasmus attempted in 1503 took for granted the external forms of Catholic practice and was in effect in critical dialogue with them; in the closing years of his life his approach was still essentially spiritual and, equally, dependent on received tradition. What had originally been devised as a programme for reanimating the legacy of the medieval church could still provide a basis for accommodating the much more radical criticism of the Reformers.

The debate with Luther over free will, referred to earlier, is a good illustration of how far Erasmus felt able to go; he will reach out as far as he can to preserve the divine initiative and acknowledge the gratuitous mercy of God, but he cannot deny the tiny but – in his view – essential acquiescence of the human will. What he does offer in his attempts to promote accommodation can be summarized under two heads: in the first place there is his respect for the spiritual integrity of the individual believer, a consequence of his stress on the subjective component in religious acts; then, closely allied to that, there is his conception of church membership as primarily a spiritual adherence, a view which softens the contours of confessional boundaries. Both these aspects are prominent in the *De puritate tabernaculi*. Thus, while it is affirmed on the one hand that there can be no salvation outside the tent of the Lord,[41] equally it is made evident that this tent, 'the association of the believers of all nations,' is open to all those pleasing to God since the beginning of the world.[42] Moreover, Erasmus charts a profound shift from the outward observance of ritual to what amounts to an internalized liturgy. First, there is the heavenly Jerusalem which is not entered 'by religious ceremonies or papal bulls but by means of a mind purified by faith and a clear conscience, and by deeds of love.'[43] Such a statement, which expresses the essence of Erasmus' teaching, can hardly be reduced to the sort of trite moralism often foisted on him. Once again he is reaching out as far as he can in the direction of faith but adding deeds as a necessary consequence; what is more, they are 'deeds of love' (*officia charitatis*), which must serve to distinguish them from any semi-pelagian lurch in the direction of merits. As he goes on to assert, Psalm 14 condemns all outward forms of worship which are not driven by inner devotion;[44] indeed the culminating device of the *De puritate tabernaculi* is to present the

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41 See 228, 246 below.
42 See 228, 230 below.
43 See 244 below.
44 See 259, 263 below.

individual Christian as the authentic temple of the Lord, consecrated and set apart, the shrine where the offerings of Solomon's temple are finally accomplished in the spirit.[45]

In conclusion it can be added that both the *De concordia* and the *De puritate tabernaculi* were initially published with accompanying texts. In the case of the *De concordia* this was the *Precatio pro pace ecclesiae*, a translation of which can be found in CWE 69. The *De puritate tabernaculi* was accompanied by *Aliquot epistolae selectae*, the final selection from Erasmus' letters to appear in his lifetime and presumably intended to affirm his orthodoxy and give weight to his plea for religious reconciliation. The letters are listed here in the sequence printed: Ep 3089 to Andrzej Krzycki (Andreas Cricius); Ep 3014 from Piotr Tomicki (Tomiczki); Ep 3049 to Piotr Tomicki; Ep 3021 from Paul III; Ep 3029 from Bartholomaeus Latomus; Ep 3048 to Bartholomaeus Latomus; Ep 3022 from Hector van Hoxwier (Hoxvirius); Ep 2394 from Andrea Alciati; Ep 1878 from Henry VIII; Ep 1272 from Stanislaus Thurzo; Ep 1785 from Mercurino Gattinara; Ep 1953 from Piotr Tomicki; Ep 2982 from Jacopo Sadoleto; Ep 2973 from Jacopo Sadoleto; Ep 2699 from Stanislaus Thurzo; Ep 3043 to Damião de Gois (Goes); Ep 3046 to Piotr Kmita; Ep 3026 from Pietro Bembo; Ep 1197 from Mercurino Gattinara; Ep 3100 'To Friendly Readers.'

NOTE ON BIBLICAL REFERENCES

With the decline in use of the Douai-Reims translation most English versions of the Bible now available follow the divisions and numbering of the Hebrew Bible rather than the Vulgate familiar to Erasmus. This can create difficulties for the reader, especially in the case of the Psalms. The Vulgate text of the Psalms joins Psalm 9 with Psalm 10 and Psalm 114 with Psalm 115, but it also divides Psalms 116 and 147 into two parts each; consequently from 10 to 148 the Hebrew numeration is at least one figure ahead of the Vulgate. To compound the difficulty, the superscription that heads some psalms is numbered as a verse in the Vulgate but not in those versions deriving from the Hebrew. Nor is such variation confined to the Psalms. The obvious course when annotating Erasmus is to use the Vulgate, but to facilitate reference to English versions double references are given for all variable texts, first the numbers specific to the Vulgate, followed by the variant. For instance in (Vulgate) Psalm 118 where the verse numbers are common to all versions, Ps 118/119:70; but in (Vulgate) Psalm 99 where the verses

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45 See 265 below.

differ, Ps 99:2/100:1. The same method is followed in other biblical texts where there is variation, as in John 6:61/60. Titles of some books are different in the Vulgate and modern English versions; in references where such variation might cause confusion, both titles are given, as in 1 Kings/1 Sam 16:23.

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AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 38

Enarratio Psalmi 38

translated and annotated by

CAROLINNE WHITE

When Erasmus wrote his commentary on Psalm 38 in Freiburg early in 1532, he was fulfilling an undertaking made to his friend Caspar Ursinus Velius to dedicate another work to Stanislaus Thurzo, the bishop of Olmütz (present-day Olomouc in Moravia) from 1499 until 1540.[1] Although Erasmus had never met Thurzo, the bishop and his brother Johannes, bishop of Breslau, had been known to him for many years as patrons of learning whose episcopal courts had become centres of humanism. It was Thurzo, however, who had first made contact with Erasmus, in 1521, through their mutual friend Ursinus, and Erasmus replied with Ep 1242. In 1525 he dedicated his edition of Pliny's *Natural History* to Thurzo, accompanying it with Ep 1544, and in gratitude the bishop sent Erasmus a silver goblet in return. Seven years later Thurzo received his next gift from Erasmus: this was the *Enarratio psalmi 38* and we learn from Ep 2699 that he was most pleased with it and impressed by Erasmus' rhetoric and literary style. But despite the praise lavished on it by Thurzo, it would seem that the commentary on Psalm 38 was not to prove a popular or widely read work, for there was only one edition of it, that produced by Froben at Basel in March 1532, before the collected edition of Erasmus' works appeared in 1540, and there is little mention of it in contemporary writings.

So why did Erasmus choose to comment on Psalm 38? In his dedicatory letter of 13 February 1532, Erasmus tells Thurzo how Ursinus refused to accept his plea that his literary talents had been exhausted by hardship and disaster, illness and old age; in response to Ursinus' urging Erasmus finally agreed to offer this commentary, a new interpretation of Psalm 38, as a symbol of his affection for Thurzo. He expresses his belief that many earlier commentators have misinterpreted the psalm and he wishes to set this right, and, in addition, to offer an interpretation which reflects the troubles of his own day, in particular the prevalence of slander and malice within the church, and his personal experience of the suffering they cause. His bitterness in the face of calumny had already been made clear in his work *Lingua*, written in 1525, and matters had not improved by 1532, for Erasmus still found himself at the centre of controversy and attacked on various fronts. This personal bitterness at his failure to bring about peace and at the widespread misunderstanding of his views is evident again in this commentary in which he portrays the ideal spiritual leader in a complex allegory based on Psalm 38, and in particular on its heading 'For the end, to Idythun, a song of David.'

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1 See Ep 2517, dated 7 August 1531.

In fact, as with the commentary on Psalm 33, about one-quarter of the entire work is devoted to the introductory explanation of the obscure title. First the name Idythun is interpreted at length. Its literal Hebrew meaning of 'leaping over them' is taken to represent anyone who has already become a spiritual being and has 'leaped over,' that is transcended, all passions. Like Erasmus himself, such a person will be characterized by a disillusionment with this earthly life and a longing for the heavenly life. In addition, Erasmus finds much significance in Idythun's role as musician and prophet.[2] Idythun is interpreted as the performer of the song composed by David, a song of prophecy and spiritual teachings which, according to Erasmus, all teachers of the Christian church ought to try to perform for the benefit of their congregations. In this way they will be imitating Christ who alone combined and perfectly fulfilled the roles of David as cithara player and Idythun as 'leaper.' Both in his ministry on earth and in his death Christ surpassed David by performing the most beautiful song, which still has the same powerful effect today on those who listen to it; as an outstanding leaper Christ has in spiritual terms surpassed Idythun, leaping over earthly passions and the rituals of the Jewish law and trampling upon death so as to bring redemption to man. The significance of Christ as supreme cithara player and leaper is brought out by Erasmus in a series of daring parallels, playing on literal and metaphorical senses and supported by a variety of biblical passages.

Having portrayed Christ as the perfect role model, Erasmus broadens the picture by stating his belief that the apostles and martyrs were also outstanding in these roles, as all Christians should strive to be, in particular those who hold responsible positions within the church, such as bishops and priests. Anyone who wishes to be an outstanding lyre player – in the sense of an interpreter of the word of God – must also be an outstanding leaper to avoid being dragged down by human desires. While maintaining the complex allegory on the roles of Idythun and David, Erasmus gives advice to priests and bishops on how to instruct their congregations, putting before them St Paul as another example of an excellent musician and leaper who put serving Christ above pleasing his fellow men, who was sensitive to the different needs of his audience without sacrificing his integrity, and who did not allow either love of life or fear of death to obstruct his devotion to

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2 See 1 Chron 25:1. Idythun was appointed by David as choir master of one of his three choirs, and it is thought that Psalms 38, 61, and 76 were composed for Idythun to perform. On Erasmus' use of the figure of Idythun as a model for Christians, see CWE 63 lviii–lix.

Christ. Erasmus himself admits that there are many temptations and emotions which can hinder ordinary Christians from a similar devotion if the things of this world are loved in the wrong way, in a worldly rather than a spiritual manner. Proper devotion can be achieved only if the Christian uses the right instrument to produce God's word (in other words, does not use secular philosophy or heretical doctrines in his preaching), and if he is in harmony with himself, the outer man with the inner (in other words, if he avoids hypocrisy). Others who fail to perform God's music correctly, according to Erasmus, are those who reject the Old Testament and those who put either excessive or insufficient emphasis on regulations and rituals. Such men are evident everywhere in Erasmus' own day, everywhere there is discord, even among Christians. Here as elsewhere in his writings Erasmus shows himself to be perceptive of human faults and sensitive to the difficulties of human life.

At the end of his tropological discussion of the significance of the psalm's title Erasmus briefly considers the possible historical event which the psalm describes in its fundamental, literal sense. He thinks it most probable that the psalm alludes to the story of how Shimei insulted David, told in 2 Samuel 16, though he finds it more useful to make it apply to Christ, to the church, the prophets, apostles, or bishops, or in more general terms to anyone whose sufferings in this world have persuaded him to turn to Christ as the only reliable source of help. Before beginning a verse-by-verse interpretation of the psalm Erasmus exhorts his readers to join him in emulating Idythun, to unite in producing a harmonious spiritual music and thereby to reach the perfect harmony of heaven.

The section dealing with the interpretation of the first verse of Psalm 38 has much in common with parts of the *Lingua*, with its lengthy development of the theme of slander.[3] Erasmus admits that it is very difficult for anyone to keep himself from occasionally saying or even writing things which are wrong, but he feels strongly that such slips should be regarded with tolerance rather than being exaggerated to the point of slander. Even the church Fathers, whose authority is so great, were guilty of occasional mistakes, and Erasmus gives many specific examples as evidence. He now launches an attack not only on those who are keen to criticize others but

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3 Although in the *Lingua* Erasmus set out to treat both positive and negative uses of the tongue, it is the negative ones that predominate. In the dedicatory letter (CWE 29 259) he writes that 'the unbridled tongue is the disease of the mind that has the greatest power to harm,' and the largest section of the work (341–67) is dedicated to slander.

also on those who, under the guise of righteousness, distort the words of others so as to be able to attack them. For the victims of slanderous abuse Erasmus feels great sympathy, having himself suffered in this way. He regards the speaker of Psalm 38 as a victim of this kind, one who has learned to keep silent lest what he says be open to slander or lest he regret what he has said in a moment of anger. But Erasmus denies that the speaker has already attained perfection; rather he is still struggling to overcome temptation and anger, provoked by the malice of others, and he is humbled by a consciousness of his own sins, wearied by his own suffering. This is the point at which he turns to God, placing his hope in him rather than in his fellow men.

The meaning of the verse 'Behold you have made my days measurable' is less obvious and Erasmus digresses to discuss a number of possible translations of the Hebrew and different interpretations, all of which he takes to signify the brevity and hardship of human life, with the following verse indicating the unstable and insubstantial nature of human existence. He illustrates these problems with numerous examples for he is determined to show what perspective is necessary for anyone who wishes to leap over all that is earthly, transitory, and deceptively attractive to reach the eternal and heavenly.

Erasmus now expands on what he sees as the second major theme of the psalm in a powerful condemnation of everything in this life which seems to offer man happiness but which in fact makes life painful or at least futile. All these things must be rejected if a man is to put his hope in God, who 'alone is everything to us – wealth, strength, beauty, reputation, wisdom, and justice' – and from whom only our own sinfulness can separate us. Erasmus explains that God allows people to suffer and be humiliated in order to make them come to their senses and renounce their sins, enabling them to be transformed into new spiritual creatures. All men must suffer because that is the human lot, but man can put his suffering to good use if he accepts it and if it leads him to repent and trust in God. If he does so, he can be described, in the words of Psalm 38, as a stranger and a sojourner in this world, for his true home is in heaven. Regarding this life as a difficult and unpleasant journey, he longs to arrive with God where he will find true rest, happiness, and security. As a whole the psalm is interpreted as offering a picture of a man gradually advancing through suffering towards an understanding that the Lord is punishing him for his sins; he begs for mercy that he may be reconciled to God before he departs this life.

Despite his characteristically moral and spiritual interpretation of this psalm Erasmus somewhat surprisingly criticizes those earlier exegetes who

have, he feels, made excessive use of allegory and from whom he claims to differ much in his interpretation. We can assume that he was familiar with the discussions of Psalm 38 made by Ambrose, Augustine, Arnobius the younger, and Cassiodorus, who dwell at length on the virtues of silence when under persecution, and who, like Erasmus, consider the psalm to be portraying someone who is not yet perfect but who is, according to Ambrose, an example of patience.[4] Ambrose too, in his lengthy interpretation, considers various readings, particularly of verse 6. Augustine emphasizes the importance of turning away from the things of this world to the eternal, which alone really exists. However, Erasmus does not discuss these other interpretations in detail, limiting himself to certain textual points such as variant readings accepted by Jerome and Augustine. Such interest in textual matters is of course also typical of Erasmus.

Indeed, as a whole this psalm commentary not only provides an insight into Erasmus' views on such things as the duties of the spiritual leader and the vanity of human wishes but also offers a moving self-portrait of Erasmus towards the end of his life. He clearly feels that there are strong similarities between himself and Idythun as portrayed in Psalm 38: both are men who have turned to God as their sole hope but who are not yet free of the troubles and temptations of this earthly life.

The present translation is based on the the text established by R. Stupperich in ASD V-3 170–243 (Amsterdam 1986), with corrections from the LB edition; the principal divergences from the ASD text have been noted.

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4 For these patristic commentaries on Psalm 38, see PL 14 (1845) 1039–58 for Ambrose, PL 36 412–31 for Augustine, PL 53 378–9 for Arnobius the Younger, and PL 70 279–86 for Cassiodorus.

PSALM 38

1 In finem pro Idythun ipsi David.

2 Dixi custodiam vias meas ut non delinquam in lingua mea. [Os habet clausum et obseratum, quoties peccator consistit adversus iustum.]

3 Obmutui et humiliatus sum et silui a bonis et dolor meus renovatus est.

4 Incaluit cor meum intra me et in meditatione mea exardescet ignis.

5 Loquutus sum in lingua mea, notum fac mihi [ostende mihi], Domine, finem meum et numerum dierum meorum quis est, ut sciam quid desit mihi.

6 Ecce mensurabiles posuisti dies meos et substantia mea tanquam nihilum ante te. Verum tamen universa vanitas, omnis homo vivens.

7 Verumtamen in imagine pertransit homo, sed et frustra conturbatur. Thesaurizat, et ignorat cui congregabit ea.

8 Et nunc quae est expectatio mea, nonne Dominus? Et substantia mea apud te est.

9 Ab omnibus iniquitatibus meis erue me. Opprobrium insipienti dedisti me.

10 Obmutui et non aperui os meum, quoniam tu fecisti.

11 Amove a me plagas tuas,

12 A fortitudine [a virga] manus tuae ego defeci. In increpationibus propter iniquitatem corripuisti hominem; tabescere fecisti sicut araneam animam eius. Verum vane perturbatur omnis homo [verumtamen vanitas omnis homo].

13 Exaudi orationem meam, Domine, et clamorem meum exaudi, ad lacrymas meas ne obsurdescas, quoniam advena sum et peregrinus apud te, sicut omnes patres mei.

14 Remitte mihi ut refrigerer, priusquam abeam et amplius non ero.

1 For the end, to Idythun, a song of David.

2 I have said: I shall guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue. [I have put a bolt on my mouth when the sinner confronted me.]

3 I have kept silent and I was humbled and refrained from saying good things and my distress grew worse.

4 My heart grew hot within me and a fire burned in my thoughts.

5 I spoke with my tongue, Lord, let me know my end and what is the number of my days, that I may know what I lack.

6 Behold, you have made my days measurable and my substance is as nothing before you. Indeed, the whole is vanity, every living man.

7 But yet man passes in a shadow, he is disturbed in vain. He lays up treasures but does not know for whom he is accumulating them.

8 And now what is my expectation if not the Lord? And my substance is with you.

9 Deliver me from all my transgressions. You have made me an object of scorn to the fool.

10 I was dumb and I did not open my mouth, since you have done it.

11 Remove your blows from me,

12 For I have already grown weak by the strength of your hand; you have chastened man in rebukes because of his wickedness, you have caused his soul to dissolve like a spider's web. Surely every man's agitation is an illusion.

13 Hear my words, o Lord, and heed my cries; do not be deaf to my tears since I am a stranger and a sojourner in your eyes like all my fathers.

14 Let me go that I may find relief before I depart and am no more.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM SENDS GREETING TO THE MOST ILLUSTRIOUS PRINCE AND PRELATE OF THE CHURCH, STANISLAUS THURZO, BISHOP OF OLMÜTZ[1]

Silence destroyed Amyclae alone[2] but many a friendship has been undone by a lack of exchange of friendly greetings,[3] if we are to believe the old sayings. But since among all possessions there is none that can compare with a loyal friend,[4] I did not intend, most distinguished of bishops, that a lengthy interruption in our correspondence should appear to have deprived me of such an outstanding patron. Indeed, my dear Thurzo has never been out of my thoughts. For how could this happen unless I were one of the most uncivilized and ungrateful people alive?

But from time to time I heard that you had changed your place of residence, at other times I was in doubt as to whether you were safe amidst such turbulent events, at times some suspicion nagged at my mind that perhaps one of those who bear poison on their tongue might have destroyed your former kindness towards me or at least caused it to cool. But Caspar Velius,[5] once the pupil of your kind self, came to visit us on his way to the synod the emperor had called at Speyer,[6] and he dispelled all my worries, confirming both that all your affairs were going well and that your former devotion to me had certainly not abated. But what he had done earlier by means of frequent letters, he then did in person, namely remonstrated with me because I had not reawakened such a great friend's memory of me with a memento of my studies. When I replied that I did in fact always have a desire to do so but that up till now I had produced nothing worthy of so great a bishop, he remonstrated even more strongly with me for not sufficiently appreciating Thurzo's kindness. No book, he said, was so

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1 The dedicatory letter is Ep 2608; on Thurzo, see CEBR III 324–5.

2 *Adagia* I ix 1: *Amyclas perdidit silentium*. See also A. Otto *Die sprichwörter . . . der Römer* (Leipzig 1890) 103.

3 *Adagia* II i 26: *Multas amicitias silentium diremit*. Although the Latin word *silentium* is translated 'silence,' the Greek word from which the phrase derives means rather 'lack of intercourse or conversation.' Cf Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1157b 13, sometimes translated as 'out of sight, out of mind,' referred to in this adage.

4 Ecclus 6:15

5 Caspar Ursinus Velius, scholar, poet, and diplomat, had first met Erasmus in November 1521; see CEBR III 356–7.

6 The Diet of Speyer (1529) decreed the full enforcement of the Edict of Worms (1521) and thus an end to all toleration of Luther's followers within the Holy Roman Empire. In defiance of the decree Lutheran princes and free imperial cities issued a *Protestatio*, the origin of the word 'Protestant.'

insignificant that he would not accept it as if it were a great gift, as long as it were the legitimate offspring of the Erasmian genius. Again, when I made the excuse that my genius had long been exhausted by hard work and disasters, by illnesses and old age, he would accept no refusal and would not be quiet until I promised what he asked for.

And so I have done as the British often do: when they are apart, they send each other tokens, as they call them. It is not the value of these that they regard as important, but the spirit in which they are sent adds charm to the gift, even if it is only a small piece of material no larger than a finger nail. Challenged by their example and having conceived some hope of success from Velius' words, I am sending the Thirty-eighth Psalm which the writers of old interpreted in various ways, though they did so in such a manner that, in my opinion at any rate, they seem to have distorted some things and failed properly to understand others. Now you must be the judge of my achievement. Indeed I must confess that I sweated not a little to make the whole argument consistent. This little gift, such as it is, will bring me great pleasure if your good self accepts it gladly, but you will double my pleasure if you are kind enough to notify me by letter if there is any point you would like me to interpret differently. I have no doubt that you will come across many such things.

Moreover, in passing you will find in this little commentary a kind of picture of our times: amidst so many human disasters there is none more dangerous, amidst so many plagues there is none more pestilential, than tongues dipped in deadly poison – they reign supreme in this age more than in any other. But you will also recognize something of my own situation, and perhaps it will surprise you that this poor old man, no more than half alive as he is, can still hold the rudder on a straight course though buffeted by such devastating storms and squalls from every direction. But the Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?[7] I can speak Greek with you because I know that, unless I am mistaken, you have for some time now been a lover of Greek and, despite being already on the threshold of old age,[8] you have devoted a great deal of effort to Greek literature, to the great shame of many, no doubt, who as young men neglect this very important area of their studies and who burst into the inner sanctum of theology with unwashed feet, as they say.[9]

Farewell. Freiburg im Breisgau, 13 February 1532

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7 Erasmus here quotes from the Septuagint version of Ps 26/27:1.
8 Cf Homer *Iliad* 22.60; *Odyssey* 15.348.
9 *Adagia* I ix 54: *Illotis pedibus ingredi*

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 38, 'I HAVE SAID: I SHALL GUARD MY WAYS,' BY D. ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM, DIFFERING SUBSTANTIALLY FROM THE EXPOSITIONS OF THE PSALM BY EARLIER WRITERS

The title of this psalm shines out at the very beginning like some exceptionally bright star, forcing us to open the eyes of our minds and tugging at the ears of our hearts to prevent us nodding off while we are listening, or yawning while we receive what is brought forth from the mystical sanctuary of the divine spirit. This is what it says: 'For the end, to Idythun, a song of David.' When you hear the words 'for the end,' which often indicate fulfilment rather than a conclusion (as when Christ is said by St Paul to be the 'end of the law,'[1] not because he made the law obsolete but because he brought it to fulfilment), you are being warned, right from the start, to expect nothing trivial, nothing commonplace or ordinary in this psalm, but rather something sublime and perfect. For strength is made perfect in weakness[2] and true faith is tried and tested in temptation like gold in the fire.

When you hear the phrase 'to Idythun' (a name which means 'leaping over them' in Hebrew),[3] you are made to think of a devout soul, worn down by the hard grind of human existence which contains far more aloe than honey,[4] and exhausted, so to speak, by the false accusations, reproaches, and insults of the wicked. It is a soul sighing in its desire to fly from the refuge provided by this wretched dwelling place and to find that perfect rest of blessed minds from whose eyes God has wiped away every tear[5] and who now have no grief, lamentation, or suffering to fear.

When you hear the word 'song,' you must understand that these things are not uttered in a loud voice but with a strong inner emotion.[6] One might

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1 Rom 10:4
2 2 Cor 12:9
3 Jerome *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 827; cf Augustine *Enarratio in Psalmum 38* 1 (on verse 1) PL 36 412.
4 Juvenal 6 181; *Adagia* I viii 66: *Plus aloes, quam mellis habet*
5 Isa 25:8; Rev 7:17, 21:4
6 On Erasmus' elaboration of the musical theme in this psalm, see Gordon 169–80.

say that a song occurs in suffering while music is produced in grief. There is however also a song of ascents,[7] and a song of triumph with which we give thanks to God after victory; but anyone who in adversity acknowledges his faults and raises his thoughts to God produces a song most pleasing to God's ears. Unless you have sung this song you will never be able to sing the song of triumph. However, this song contains two strains, one expressing weariness of this earthly life, the other a longing for the heavenly life. There are many things which, on account of the troubles they cause, make virtuous souls keen to leave this life, but more numerous are the things which would draw our hearts away from this world even if this life were not utterly vitiated by so many misfortunes.

When you hear the name David, you are reminded that this song did not originate from human feelings but from the spirit of Christ: King David, who was also a cithara player,[8] frequently serves as a type of Christ in the sacred writings. The melody is pleasing to the ears of the eternal King only if David supplies the song and Idythun performs it. He did not invent the song himself; it was first dictated by that Spirit which, through the prophets and apostles, has produced so many songs for us. These have such power that they can bring the dead back to life, as long as our ears are not blocked by earthly desires. For a teacher of the church should be nothing other than an instrument of the Spirit, using the human tongue to convey its sounds to men. If we look at it from the point of view of concrete things, a cithara is something distinct from a cithara player, and according to the historical account David, the composer of this song, was different from Idythun, its performer; nevertheless, according to an allegorical interpretation, it is not absurd for the same man to be both cithara and cithara player or the same person to be David the king as well as Idythun who plucked the strings. According to the more literal sense, as narrated in the twenty-fifth chapter of the first book of Chronicles,[9] David set apart for the worship of God certain musicians who were not only to sing but also to prophesy with citharas, harps, and cymbals; they were not, however, to sing at weddings or in the theatre, nor at dances, parties, or banquets, but only in the temple; not to a human audience but only before God. In that passage their task is referred

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7 These are the so-called Gradual Psalms, ie Psalms 119/120–133/134, each of which bears a title in Hebrew rendered by Jerome as 'canticum graduum.' See CWE 64 189 n420.

8 At 1 Kings/1 Sam 16:23 David is said to have entered the service of King Saul as a skilled cithara player.

9 1 Chr 25:1–2

to as a *ministerium* 'service,' to prevent anyone assuming for himself the task of teaching: rather he should wait until called by David. And when called upon he must not spoil the heavenly melody which has been granted to him by adding any of the falsehoods of men or any earthly passions.

It is only the person who is a true Idythun (in other words, one who has already become a spiritual being and has leaped over all human passions) who can sing nothing but prophecies. The apostle Paul uses the term 'prophets' to refer not only to those who predict the future but also to those who reveal the hidden meanings of Scripture's mysteries.[10] (For people who believe that human learning can be used to understand Scripture, without the inspiration of the Spirit, are mistaken). To be sure, that earlier kind of prophecy which was once highly regarded in the synagogue has not been obliterated now that the radiant light of the gospels has shone forth but it has been put into the shade. For now he has come whom they prophesied would come and the things which they predicted would happen have to a large extent been accomplished, and yet in fact the church is now more than ever provided with prophets who feed the Lord's flock[11] with spiritual teachings, bringing forth from the treasure of Scripture what is new and what is old.[12] It is this kind of prophet whom Paul hopes will speak in churches everywhere, so that the weak may be strengthened, the erring instructed, and the wicked may see reason.[13]

But just as our David, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the most distinguished of all cithara players and prophets, so he is also the most eminent of all Idythuns, in other words, the foremost and greatest of leapers.[14] From this one source, so to speak, he flows to all so that they may be worthy to be called cithara players or Idythuns. In the past the Greeks used this proverb: Many bear the wand, few feel the god;[15] similarly in our own time one can see many people playing the cithara but, alas, there are few who prophesy. Or if they do sing a prophetic song, they spoil the spiritual melody even if they touch no string which ought not to be touched. He alone can produce a pure and clear sound in his prophecy whose lyre has been granted to him

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10 Cf 1 Cor 14; *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-4 106:530–3; J. Vitrier 'Sermon de la Penthecouste' f 209v in *L'homéliaire de Jean Vitrier* ed André Godin (Geneva 1971) 184 and n165.
11 Cf John 21:15–17.
12 Matt 13:52
13 1 Cor 14
14 See n3.
15 *Adagia* I vii 6: *Multi thyrsigeri, pauci Bacchi*; cf Plato *Phaedo* 69C.

by David and whose sonorous instrument has been skilfully tuned by the spirit of Christ. If the spirit of Christ, in answer to your prayers, deigns to play the lyre of my tongue, too, it might perhaps be agreeable and fruitful to contemplate this lyre player for a while, as if he were a painting of outstanding artistry. In this one person let us first consider the lyre player and then Idythun, so that we may better prepare ourselves to imitate that most perfect model.

The Lord's body was the chosen lyre, an instrument of great purity, which the heavenly Spirit constructed out of the purest virgin and created completely untainted by any earthly blemish. For the whole period that Christ was present on earth and lived among men, this lyre never ceased to celebrate the glory of the Father. This was true of Christ's miraculous birth and during his still more miraculous maturity; it was true when he revealed a glimmer of his divine strength and by his word healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, made the crippled and infirm whole again, cleansed the lepers, and drove out harmful demons at his powerful command; it was true when he subdued the winds and the sea and brought the dead back to life: he assigned the praise and glory for all these deeds to the Father as their principal cause. In addition, it is true of the ways in which he emphasized the reality of the human nature he had assumed: when he fasted, prayed, hungered, thirsted, grew weary, and when he was arrested, bound, beaten, and put to death. For it is not only a wise son who makes his father glad, as is stated in Proverbs,[16] but also an obedient one, and there is no greater obedience than obedience unto death and death on a cross.[17] And indeed, with his lyre he has fulfilled every kind of prophecy by showing that he knows the secret thoughts of men; by revealing the Scriptures and teaching that the time has now come with regard to which the prophets foretold so many things; by predicting his own death, burial, and resurrection and his return to heaven; by foretelling the coming of the Comforter and warning the disciples what they would suffer for his name's sake; and finally by promising his followers that they would rise again from the dead and have eternal life, but declaring that unbelievers would be consigned to hell.[18]

And yet, in order that he might truly give his greatest performance in the final act, he never played his lyre more melodiously than when his whole body was stretched out on the cross and he produced that final song

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16 Prov 10:1
17 Phil 2:8
18 Cf Mark 16:16; John 3:36.

which was so pleasing to his Father's ears and so beneficial to us.[19] What is lovelier than that song echoing the Twenty-first Psalm, in which the innocent man intercedes on behalf of the guilty, shifting the charge against them on to himself? What more wonderful than that voice with which he intercedes with the Father on behalf of those who were not only responsible for his death but assailed him as he hung upon the cross with insults more painful than death itself: 'Father,' he said, 'forgive them, for they know not what they do.'[20] This was undoubtedly the voice of perfect love and it did not speak in vain, for the lyre player's plea was granted because of the reverence due to him.[21] The strings of love could hardly be more perfectly tuned. His final utterances were produced with the strings of faith stretched to the utmost, when that exceptional lyre player commended his spirit with a loud cry into his Father's hands and then breathed his last, willingly giving up the ghost.[22] This chord was so powerful that at the sound of his voice the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom, the earth shook and rocks split, tombs opened, and many of the dead were raised; the attendants were terrified, the centurion was converted, and the sun was shrouded in darkness.[23]

Has man-made music[24] ever had a similar effect? In ancient literature it is related that there are certain melodies, played on the flute, which can relieve the severe pain caused by sciatica: Ismenias of Thebes is said to have used these to help many Boeotians. Similarly Terpander and Arion[25] used songs to bring relief to the people of Lesbos and Ionia who were suffering from the most painful illnesses. Even today it is customary for people in Italy to use certain melodies to help those bitten by a tarantula (a kind of venomous spider) and the Germans use songs to revive and heal people who have collapsed in an epileptic fit. Music is used to bring sleep to those who suffer from insomnia or who are verging on a state of delirium; and it

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19 See F.P. Pickering *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages* (London 1970) 285–301 on the iconographical connection between the lyre and the cross; cf *In psalmum 33* CWE 64 292. Cf George Herbert's poem *Easter* which develops the connection between Christ crucified and the lute. On Christ as the singer of the perfect song in his resurrection, see Gordon 176–7.

20 Luke 23:34

21 Heb 5:7

22 Luke 23:46

23 Matt 27:50–4.

24 Boethius *De musica* 1.1 PL 63 1170 gives examples taken from classical literature of the power of music; see Gordon 171.

25 Boethius *De musica* 1.1 PL 63 1170

is common knowledge that babies can gradually be induced to cease their crying by means of soothing lullabies.

There are some tunes, known as Phrygian, which rouse people to fury while others can calm an angry man and bring him to a more sober state, as they say Pythagoras managed to do in the case of the young man from Taormina, when he ordered the flute player to play spondaic rhythms instead of Phrygian music.[26] Everyone knows that men can be roused to battle by means of song. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that there is no person of any age or of either sex who is not sensitive to the power of music, even if they cannot appreciate the artistic skill: the reason for this is thought to be that according to Plato the world soul was created in accordance with a musical system, with the result that the souls of individual beings, because of their innate perceptions, are delighted by melodious music but offended by ugly sounds.[27] Even until recently people believed that there were certain tunes which caused springs to leap up as if they were dancing; such a belief makes the famous story of Arion and the dolphin less hard to believe, and Virgil's line, 'The clammy snake bursts in the meadow if you sing,'[28] is consequently not wholly fabulous.

But I must not list all the strange events, whether real or imaginary, which the people of antiquity related in celebrating the art of music. Even if all these things are true, including those many things which the people of old told about Orpheus and his lyre, who has ever told of music having such power as Christ's had? Or who has ever dared to imagine such music? For a time David was able to use his lyre to control Saul's madness but soon his master's evil spirit returned.[29] But what was this compared with the all-powerful lyre of Christ which can drive out demons and transform the anger of God the Father into pity? This lyre grew silent for a short time while the Lord's body was hidden in the tomb, but the Father did not allow such a sweet-sounding lyre to be silent for long. He rouses it as it lies inactive when he cries out in the mystical psalm: 'Awake my glory, awake, o harp and lyre,' to which the lyre then replies: 'I shall arise at dawn.'[30] Here

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26 Ibidem. Cf Augustine *Contra Julianum* 5.5.23 PL 44 797–8; Quintilian 1.10.32; Henry Chadwick *Boethius. The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford 1981) 92.

27 Cf Plato *Republic* 617B, *Timaeus* C–D; Boethius *De musica* 1.1 PL 63 1168; Gordon 170 on the power of music.

28 The story of Arion and the dolphin is recounted in Herodotus 1.23 and Ovid *Fasti* 2.83–118; the Virgilian line is *Eclogues* 8.71.

29 1 Kings/1 Sam 16:23

30 Ps 56:9/57:8; see Gordon 170.

too the lyre is uttering a prophecy, seeing that it was at dawn that the Lord rose up to make manifest the glory of the Father throughout the world. As a matter of fact, that same lyre player performs for us even today in the sacred writings: he does so through the words of the holy Fathers, as long as we listen to his music with our ears unblocked. Even nowadays he heals the sick when he shakes people out of their apathy, drives out demons when he frees men from insane desires, and brings the dead back to life when he calls them back from a life of wickedness to the pursuit of goodness.

It would be pleasing to spend more time in contemplation of this lyre player, but the brevity of the title calls us back to our explanation of the name Idythun. For the Lord was not only the most excellent of all lyre players: even among those who are renowned as great leapers he holds by far the highest position.[31] This is he whom the bride sees with prophetic eyes when she says: 'The voice of my beloved, Behold, he comes leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.'[32] He who loves in this way walks with no ordinary step; he who is transported by a violent emotion leaps forward: he leaps from mountain to mountain, bounding over the hills in his eagerness to hurry on. Between the angels, the seraphim and cherubim, the mountains are high, but even these did not stop that wonderful Idythun; even over these did the Son of God leap. Before the Law there existed mountains of exceptional prominence, such as Job, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Moses, too, was an outstanding mountain and so were the other prophets, but on none of them did the Lord rest. Instead, step by step, as it were, he leaped towards his bride the church with the impatience of love, bounding over all the wise men of this world as if they were little hills. For what appears very high to the eyes of ordinary men is low compared with the sublime heights of God. He who leaps onto something sets his foot down, but only for a moment; he who leaps over something scorns it completely. It was in this way, according to the records of secular history, that Remus leaped over the city walls which Romulus had built.[33] Perhaps it would not be absurd to interpret the hills as being the ceremonies and precepts of the Old Law. The Lord has leaped over these ceremonies and by way of the precepts he has leaped to a more perfect justice than that of the Scribes and Pharisees[34] – not because he has advanced this far himself but because he has carried his members forward to this point.

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31 Cf Screech 190.
32 Song of Sol 2:8
33 For the story of Romulus and Remus, see Livy 1.7.2–3.
34 Cf Matt 5:20.

It is this same person whom the prophet David witnessed accomplishing amazing leaps, when he speaks in the spirit in Psalm 18 saying: 'On the sun he has placed his tent and he himself appears like a bridegroom emerging from his chamber.' When you hear the word 'bridegroom' you will realize, I think, that this is the same man who leaps over the mountains in the song of love. Now consider, I beg you, the extraordinary leaps which he makes in every direction. 'He rejoiced like a strong man in running the course; his rising is from the end of the heavens and his setting is at the heavens' heights.'[35] What the sun is to this visible world, God is to the universe as a whole. It is on this sun that the Son of God pitched his tent, he who has always existed with the Father, dwelling in light inaccessible.[36] From these ineffable heights that mighty Man of strength came down with great eagerness into the Virgin's womb, not dragged by force but drawn by love; and finally, after he had leaped down to the underworld with great force, he leaped up again and returned to that same brilliant light in which he had existed before the creation of the world. In proceeding from the Father he nevertheless remained with the Father, and in the same way his final leap brings him up to be seated at the right hand of the Father, without abandoning his bride who is still to some extent active on earth.

Prudentius, that excellent musician of the Christian philosophy, expressed in elegant verse the prophecy conveyed in this psalm: 'He proceeds from his chamber by the royal hall of modesty, a strong man of twofold nature, eager to run along the path.'[37] He emanated from the Father and he returned to the Father; he travelled right down into hell and then went back to the seat of God. Undoubtedly love gave his feet wings.[38] It was certainly an amazing leap when the Son leaped out of the Father's bosom into the Virgin's womb, and again when he leaped up from the earth to the heights of the cross whence he was to draw everything to himself.[39] And then, in his bodily form, he leaped down from the cross into the tomb, while in spirit he leaped down to the uttermost corners of hell; thence he leaped up again onto the earth and from earth up to the throne of God.

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35 Ps 18:6–7/19:4–6

36 1 Tim 6:16

37 Erasmus is mistaken in attributing these lines to Prudentius; in fact, they are the fifth and sixth verses of Ambrose's hymn *Intende, qui regis Israel* (more commonly known as *Veni redemptor gentium* from the first line of its second verse) PL 16 (1845) 1411.

38 *Adagia* IV viii 86: *Alas addere*; cf Virgil *Aeneid* 8.224.

39 Cf John 12:32.

This has been elegantly described in the hymn which the church choir sings by turns on Ascension Day:[40] 'It is appropriate for the Son of God to be given the name Idythun, for he leaped over all the mountains and hills of Bethel with great speed and leaped down from heaven into the Virgin's womb and then into the deep waters of this world. When his power had calmed them, he leaped into the loathsome darkness of Phlegethon,[41] and after destroying the dominion of its prince and rescuing from it large numbers of those who fought for him, he shone his light on the world and, victorious, he led captivity captive[42] there and presented himself, restored to life, to those who were his disciples, servants, and friends. Finally, he made what is to this day the greatest leap of all, leaping up through the clouds and the heavens in one sweep.'

These stages by which the eternal wisdom brought redemption to the human race are sometimes referred to in the Bible as 'runnings,' sometimes as 'leaps,' because they involved no compulsion – by which the unwilling usually need to be dragged – but only love, rushing on of its own accord, filled with desire. Scripture occasionally refers to such eagerness on the part of the spirit and the sudden impulses experienced by the soul also as 'flights,' as for example when Isaiah asks admiringly of the apostles who imitate the Lord's love and rush to and fro throughout the world, spreading the gospel with unflagging enthusiasm: 'Who are these who fly like a cloud and like doves to their windows?'[43]

This was also the kind of leap which that excellent lyre player had in mind when he sang: 'Who will give me the wings of a dove and I will fly away and be at rest?'[44] According to observers of nature no bird is comparable to the dove for its speed in flight, although it is otherwise a harmless and peaceful bird; and so the prophet did not pray for the wings of an eagle, a hawk, or a kite but for those of a dove. When injured this bird does not plan revenge and seeks no other remedy than flight from all the troubles which fill the lives of mortal creatures. But where does the dove of Christ fly to? Nowhere but to Christ himself, seated in heaven, he who loves

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40 The lines which follow, given as continuous prose, are in fact a series of strophes and antistrophes (sung 'by turns') from the Ascension-day sequence *Summi triumphum regis* by Notker Balbulus (c 840–912); for the original see *Analecta hymnica* liii no 67 3–11.

41 According to Greek mythology Phlegethon, or Pyriphlegethon, was one of the rivers of the underworld.

42 Cf Eph 4:8.

43 Isa 60:8

44 Ps 54:7/55:6

and protects dove-like purity. The speed of the dove-like soul is amazing: although it inhabits an earthly body, from time to time it is snatched up to heaven and has its home there more truly in loving than in breathing.[45] It was therefore also fitting for the Holy Spirit to appear first in the shape of a dove and then as fire, for those on whom it breathes become pure, free from bitterness or desire for revenge; it also makes them eager to perform every good deed,[46] always ardent in their longing for the heavenly country. Furthermore, even though Christ was the supreme lyre player and leaper, the apostles and the other martyrs were in fact also outstanding in these fields. Indeed, all who profess the name of Christ must strive to the best of their ability, that they too might become lyre players, emulating Idythun; but this ought to be particularly true of those who are the apostles' successors as shepherds of the Lord's flock and teachers of the people. For such men ought always to produce prophetic sounds concerning the law of the Lord, not only with the cithara when they instruct the people, but also with the harp when they rebuke those who have gone astray, or with the tambourine when they try to drum some sense into those who are stubbornly resisting the truth (for Idythun is said to have been a skilful player of these three instruments). They should also do the same with the sweet-sounding cymbals when they use the gentleness of love to moderate the harshness of a rebuke, to prevent their brother becoming too depressed; and finally also with the lyre when they call those who have fallen into error back onto the right path by means of tactful advice and when they become weak with the weak.[47] It is this kind of music that the holy apostle urges his friend Timothy to practise when he says to him: 'I charge you before God and Jesus Christ who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his coming and his kingdom, preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, implore, and rebuke in all patience and erudition.'[48]

There is in fact no musical instrument which is not represented by Holy Scripture and no kind of song which it does not mention, as we see from what Paul writes, also in his letter to Timothy: 'All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for instruction, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be perfect,

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45 There is a play on words here between the verbs *amare* and *animare*. For a similar play on words, see Allen Ep 843 to Maarten Lips: 'et anima magis illic est ubi amat quam ubi animat.'

46 Cf 2 Tim 3:17.

47 Cf 1 Cor 9:22.

48 2 Tim 4:1–2

equipped for every good work.'[49] But a man cannot be a good lyre player unless he is like Idythun and has, in spirit, leaped over all human desires. For if a desire for gain should interfere with his playing – or a thirst for fame or anger or hatred or fear of men or heretical error – that one string which is out of tune spoils the harmony as a whole. This is the kind of lyre player about whom the Apostle writes to the Philippians: 'Some people do not preach Christ sincerely, because of envy and rivalry.'[50] But if men's ears are offended when a string is out of tune, spoiling the harmony during the performance of a piece of music, how much more must God be offended when the sacred music is spoiled by the devil's string? Is it not the case that men who are performing on the cithara or lyre before a human audience will immediately notice even the slightest difference in tone – for example of a semitone or a quarter tone – if a string is more or less taut than it should be, and will not be persuaded to continue playing until they have corrected the offending string? Can it be right that a reveller, hired to entertain at a drunken party, does this, while a lyre player, performing the word of God, is less sensitive, even though the salvation of the people redeemed by Christ's blood depends on him? If men are unable to tolerate the sound of a lyre which has just one string out of tune, should God put up with music rendered discordant by human desires? A man who is keen to become a good lyre player for the Lord should therefore leap up and raise himself high above all trivial cares, following the advice of Isaiah: 'Go up on to a high mountain, you who bring good tidings to Sion; lift up your voice with strength, you who bring good tidings to Jerusalem.'[51] The community of the church is set on a mountain and commonplace or Jewish songs are not appropriate to it. For how can it sing a sublime song if all its thoughts are creeping along the ground?[52]

If someone should interrupt me here, pointing out that it is extremely difficult to find a lyre player of this calibre among Christians, how else should I answer him if not with the ancient proverb: 'Those things which are most beautiful are also the most difficult and the hardest to find'?[53] Anyone who undertakes the duties of a bishop is practising a profession of a more than human nature and anyone who assumes this profession ought to leap over himself and fly up to the heights of the gospels. (A leap of this

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49 2 Tim 3:16–17
50 Phil 1:15
51 Isa 40:9
52 Cf Horace *Epistles* 2.1.251: 'repentes per humum.'
53 *Adagia* II i 12: *Difficilia quae pulchra*

kind – whereby a man leaps over himself – is in fact also mentioned in the mystical writings: for the competent lyre player, according to the blessed Jeremiah, will sit alone because he has raised himself above himself.)[54] He who aspires to the episcopate desires a good thing,[55] but he must earnestly consider what sort of thing it is which he aspires to, and he must decide how far he is suited to the office which he seeks to obtain. If someone were to seek to enlist in the army without possessing a weapon, he would immediately be told: 'What would you do in battle without a weapon?' And it would be no less ridiculous for someone to turn up with a machine for hurling missiles but without any knowledge of how to load it or shoot with it. No one is mad enough to go onto the stage dressed as a musician but without his lyre, or to appear with a lyre decorated with gold and jewels but without any knowledge of how to play it. What can such a man expect but to be hissed off the stage? And the greater the expectation he has raised, the greater the disgrace he will suffer. But it is far more just, if the man seeking to become a bishop is inept at preaching the word of God, that he should be told: 'What are you doing here without your lyre and without any knowledge of divine music?' For a bishop must be above all a good lyre player, a skilled harpist, and an expert with the tambourine and the cymbals, always singing and playing something, producing a powerful noise and making the ears of Christ's flock ring with his sounds.

But you must use the instruments of the angels, lest your music should have an earthly sound. The prophet Malachi writes: 'The lips of a priest should guard knowledge and men should seek the law from his mouth, because he is the angel of the Lord of hosts.'[56] Just as a messenger (for that is what the word 'angel' means in Greek) is deceitful if he conveys a different message from the one which was entrusted to him, so the lyre player is deceitful if he sings a song which was not composed by our David. For there are prophets who make prophecies which are not produced by the spirit of Christ but which that deceitful spirit, the father and prince of lies, has whispered into their ears. Such are the lyre players who distort the meaning of Scripture and force it to serve their own designs, although it is Scripture which ought to be the ruler of all men and the director of our whole life. No less detestable are those lyre players who perform the songs of David but use the wrong tunes and who introduce spurious and alien songs into the temple of the Lord.

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54 Lam 3:28
55 Cf 1 Tim 3:1.
56 Mal 2:7

In the book of Chronicles Scripture terms the task of the musician a service (*ministerium*), while Paul refers to it as a stewardship (*dispensatio*).[57] A minister performs someone else's wishes, not his own, while an administrator (*dispensator*) handles another person's affairs, but the only thing demanded of ministers and administrators alike is that they should be reliable.[58] And so any person who undertakes pastoral duties should make it his prime concern to be selected by David: for this is what Scripture says: 'David and the captains of the army selected for the service the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Idythun.'[59] The teacher performs his songs in front of a great number of people, but he ought to remain detached from their emotions. Secondly, you must not sing any other song than that composed by David. Furthermore, you should sing in the temple and sing for the edification of the church;[60] heretics sing badly for they do not sing in the temple of the Lord, but instead they utter harsh noises before unholy and reprehensible gatherings. Finally, you should sing prophetically, expounding faithfully the mystical sense of Scripture: do this in the presence of the Lord and with no other aim than the glory of God. Such was the lyre player who said: 'Am I now seeking to persuade men or God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.'[61] Usually a lyre player's main concern is to please his audience at the theatre or a party. However, in human affairs things never work out so fortunately that the crowd is pleased with what is best: most people desire musicians who perform amusing rather than edifying songs and as they have itchy ears, according to Paul,[62] they prefer a musician who tickles their ears with delightful flattery to one who calms their passions with the integrity of truth. Paul deplores the fact that some such people are to be found among the Galatians when he writes: 'I have become your enemy, then, by telling the truth.'[63] Such, certainly, are those who cry out against the prophetic song in Isaiah, saying: 'Speak to us of pleasant things, prophesy deceitful things. Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, let holy Israel go from our sight.'[64] A man who is of the earth speaks of earthly things,[65]

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57 1 Chron 25:1; Col 1:25
58 Cf 1 Cor 4:2.
59 1 Chron 25:1
60 Cf 1 Cor 14:12; Eph 4:12.
61 Gal 1:10
62 Cf 2 Tim 4:3.
63 Gal 4:16
64 Isa 30:10–11
65 Cf John 3:31.

and human things are pleasing to men. Paul, however, sought to please the divine ears, conscientiously producing a song which was not his own, but God's. 'The gospel preached by me,' he said, 'is not in accordance with men, for I did not receive it or learn it from a man, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.'[66]

However, the same kind of music does not suit all men. This is partly because of differences in human temperament, partly a matter of habit. People who by nature have a tendency towards aggression are more affected by the Phrygian type of music because of its affinity with their souls, while people of a more gentle nature prefer to listen to Lydian melodies.[67] Furthermore, each individual is more attracted by the type of music to which he is accustomed. The church's lyre player ought not to disregard these differences but should become, in the words of St Paul, all things to all men,[68] without however sacrificing the integrity of his preaching. It is a good idea to accustom oneself to the best kinds of music and familiarity with them will then make them agreeable.

No one was more versatile than Paul nor was anyone more sincere. He was as distinguished as a lyre player as he excelled in the art of leaping. Does it not involve an extraordinary leap if one is confidently to look down, as if from a great height, on all that this world contains whether desirable or repulsive? For this is what Paul writes to the Philippians: 'But what were once my assets I now through Jesus Christ count as losses. Yes, I will go further and say, because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, I count everything else as loss; because of him I have considered everything as loss and all things as dung that I might gain Christ.'[69]

This world contains many hills which stand in the way of the person who is hastening towards Christ: love for his family, for example, or the weakness of the flesh; the glitter of wealth, the respect gained by holding high office, the attractions of pleasure, or the distinction involved in being famous. And then there is the opposite kind of obstacle presented by things like wretched loneliness, poverty – which the whole world despises – or a humble position, subject to every kind of injustice; or hardship and pain, disgrace and degradation. The person who wishes his song to please the

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66 Gal 1:11–12

67 Phrygian and Lydian were the names of two of the harmonic modes according to ancient musical theory; the Phrygian mode was considered to sound warlike, the Lydian gentle.

68 1 Cor 9:22

69 Phil 3:7–8

Lord must leap over all these hills; then he must leap over the mountains, going from strength to strength until the God of gods shows himself in Sion. (For Sion too is a mountain and in Hebrew it means 'lookout post.')[70] Anyone who longs to see the Lord of hosts, who dwells on the heights[71] and whose foundations lie on the holy mountains,[72] must fly up here, away from trivial cares. Of all the holy mountains the Lord delights most in the one which bears the gates of Sion,[73] for this is the faithful city which the gates of hell cannot destroy.[74] And so anyone who wishes to sing one of the songs of Sion must leap across to this place. But this world also has mountains of its own which David curses when he says: 'Mountains of Gilboa, may no dew or rain fall on you, where the mighty of Israel have fallen,' and in another passage: 'May the Lord visit all the mountains in turn, but let him pass over Gilboa.'[75] These are the mountains of pride which first of all caused Lucifer to fall from the heights and which even today cause the death of many who appeared to have reached the summit of piety. The most blessed Paul feared the dangers of these mountains and he was granted the goad of the flesh and the blows of Satan[76] to prevent the greatness of the revelations carrying him off to the mountain of Gilboa – a Hebrew word which means 'descent.'[77] For to climb up here involves a fall from a great height, just as the true ascent means abasing oneself. Gilboa is not fertile, since wisdom does not enter into an overconfident soul, but grace is granted to the humble;[78] if grace happens to be poured down also on these mountains, then because it immediately flows away like rain it produces nothing fruitful. And so anyone who truly desires to be exalted in Christ, must be humble in himself, and anyone who thinks he is wise must become foolish,

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70 On the meaning of the name Sion, see Jerome *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 819.
71 Cf Isa 33:5.
72 Cf Ps 86/87:1.
73 Cf Ps 86/87:2.
74 Cf Matt 16:18.
75 2 Kings/2 Sam 1:21. The second quotation, 'May the Lord visit all the mountains,' etc. cannot be traced in the Scriptures but the mountain Gilboa is also referred to at 1 Kings/1 Sam 31:1 and 2 Kings/2 Sam 1:6. Cf also Ps 124/125:2 and *Lingua* CWE 29 333.
76 Cf 2 Cor 12:7.
77 Jerome gives 'descent' as one of the meanings of Gilboa in the *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 814: 'Gelboe – voluntatio, sive decursus, vel acervus pluens.'
78 Cf 1 Pet 5:5.

so that he may be so truly.[79] But if some gust of foolish ambition should drive us onto the mountains of Gilboa, we must leap off immediately and not settle there: we must be deterred by the example of him who was cast down below all humiliation when he tried to set his throne in the north,[80] which is the summit of heaven, and sought to be equal to the highest being. If that accursed mountain terrified Paul who leaped up into the third heaven and there heard secrets that man may not utter,[81] how much more must we guard against all arrogance? The love of life is a great hill and fear of death is a dreadful chasm, but Paul leaps over both when he says: 'For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.'[82]

In order, then, that we may become like Idythun, ready to leap, let us rid ourselves of all the burdens weighing down our minds which churn over many matters; and let us break free from all the restraints and ties of the flesh. How can we leap up when we are weighed down by the lead of our sins? How can we fly up when we are entangled by pleasure, trapped by the thorns of wealth, enveloped by luxury, intoxicated by the sweetness of worldly fame, and stuck deep in the mud of earthly cares which make it almost impossible to lift one's head up into the purer air? The man who sincerely wishes to impart the word which brings salvation often encounters many obstacles. The flesh says: 'If I were to make these things known publicly, I would be sentenced to a fine': leap over this swamp. 'If I declare the truth frankly, I shall get into trouble with the authorities': leap over this rock. 'I shall be considered a heretic by those who aim to please their own appetites rather than Jesus Christ':[83] leap over this obstacle. 'My life will be at risk': leap over this cliff. Do not be afraid: lift up your eyes to the mountains and you will derive help from them.[84] If you have raised your mind's eye to the hills, then you have leaped up onto the mountains, for these leaps are accomplished not physically but spiritually, and faith undoubtedly has eyes while our emotions are the feet of the soul. Anyone who takes a leap first fixes his eyes on the place which his feet are aiming for, and in the same way believing precedes loving, not so much in a temporal sense as by nature. A man has as many spiritual feet and as many strings to his lyre as he has emotions. But just as there are some emotions which are wicked,

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79 Cf 1 Cor 3:18.
80 Cf Isa 14:13.
81 2 Cor 12:2–4
82 Phil 1:21
83 Cf Rom 16:18.
84 Cf Ps 120/121:1.

some natural ones, and some which are spiritual, so there are also different strings which produce different sounds, and those strings which spoil the harmony one must either suppress or, if this is impossible as long as the mind inhabits the earthly body, then one must leap over them. If you have managed to leap up from the wicked emotions to those which are natural, then you have become a man instead of a monster. For if you love your wife or your parent or children with the kind of affection which a virtuous pagan feels for his family, you are merely a man who is living dangerously, should your love for your family on occasion lead you to do wrong. But if you have leaped over what is natural and flown up to what is spiritual, you are now something greater than man and you have begun to approach the heights where the angels dwell. If you love your wife not as a source of pleasure but because Christ commanded that she be loved, and if you are prepared to desert her rather than abandon Christ's commandments, then you have already made the leap from the soul to the spirit.

There are five external senses and five internal ones:[85] it is necessary to leap over all these if one wishes to become a true Idythun and to sing in the temple in the Lord's presence. This was the kind of lyre player that Paul was when he said: 'For we are not, like so many, falsifying God's word; but as men of sincerity, commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.'[86] There are four emotions in the human soul which tyrannize men's lives: hope, fear, joy, and sorrow. If you tune these strings to worldly matters the harmony is spoiled, but if you tune them to an attitude of devotion – in other words if you set your hope in God, if you refrain from wicked deeds through fear of God, if nothing upsets you more than the thought of wickedness, if nothing delights you more than the benefits of a virtuous disposition – then the strings produce the sweetest sounds. But a person who is upset by the loss of a piece of property but not by the loss of virtue has not tuned his strings properly.

Even the pagan poets perceived that the soul has a lyre and a music of its own and they popularized this idea in their writings. One of their tragedians, for example, speaks of a man who is led astray from what is

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85 The five external senses were agreed to be sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Opinion differed on the question of the internal senses with various philosophers proposing schemes of three, four or five: the five were generally considered to be *sensus communis*, *phantasia*, *imaginativa*, *cogitativa*, and *memorativa*. See Harry Austryn Wolfson 'The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophical Texts' *Harvard Theological Review* 28 (1935) 69–133.

86 2 Cor 2:17

right by an immoral desire 'plucking at the unmoving strings of his soul.'[87] When Socrates was warned in a dream to apply himself to music, he learned from his teacher Conus how to play the lyre; but when he still had the same dream, he versified some of Aesop's fables and recited them, for poetry, too, is a kind of music. When the same dream recurred a bit later and gave the same warning, Socrates began to apply himself to moral philosophy because in this way the soul's desires could be controlled and that wonderful harmony of the virtues could be regulated in accordance with reason.[88] (In the same way the blending of elements and rhythms in the human body, as well as the uniting of soul and body and the creation of harmony among the forces of the soul, are all types of that music which Boethius calls 'human music.')[89] Then the dream ceased to admonish Socrates. Human philosophy cannot, however, produce this melody which is suitable for the temple of the Lord as its strings are tuned to human reason; and human reason is often at variance with the spirit of God, for unless all the strings of our mind are tuned to his will they are unable to produce a tuneful melody.

Pythagoras is supposed to have discovered in the heavenly spheres some kind of wonderful harmony[90] which is termed 'cosmic' harmony (for it is considered unlikely that the heavenly bodies, being of such enormous size, should move at such great speed in silence); but the only truly heavenly music is that which is tuned to the will of him who created and guides the heavenly spheres and all that is enclosed within their orbits.

According to the philosophers there exists a third type of music which is produced particularly by percussion and wind instruments, and it was in this kind of music, so history informs us, that David and Idythun excelled. But our music is of a spiritual kind because we play our lyre for God who is spirit,[91] and the most important thing in this type of music is for every man to be in harmony with the divine will which is the most reliable guide to what is right, as the Apostle tells us when he writes to the Ephesians: 'Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.'[92] You have

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87 August Nauck *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (1856; repr Hildesheim 1964) 907 no 361; *Adagia* I vi 61: *Non movenda moves*

88 Cf Plato *Euthydemus* 272C; Cicero *Ad familiares* 9.22.3 to Paetus.

89 Boethius *De musica* 1.2 PL 63 1172; Henry Chadwick *Boethius* (Oxford 1981) 81–3 rightly emphasizes the influence of this chapter of Boethius on later writers.

90 Walter Burkert *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, Mass. 1972) 350–6; and B.L. van der Waerden 'Die Harmonielehre der Pythagoreer' *Hermes* 78 (1932) 163–99

91 Cf John 4:24.

92 Eph 5:17–22

been told what it is that produces the true harmony; now listen to what it is that ruins the instrument: 'And do not get drunk with wine, which leads to debauchery.' The most pleasing sound is produced if the strings are dry and refined and the instrument which produces such music is a man's heart, transformed from its carnal nature into something refined by the Holy Spirit. 'But be filled,' he says, 'with the Holy Spirit.' You have been shown the instrument, now listen to the song, 'addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts, always giving thanks to the Lord for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.' But since a choir produces an unpleasant sound if those who are singing at different pitches are not united in harmony and if each person does not perform his proper function, Paul adds: 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands,' and so forth, for unless these rules are observed there can be no harmony. Similarly when he is encouraging harmonious relations among the Colossians, he particularly commends mutual love: 'And more important than all these things, have love which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ rejoice in your hearts, in which you are called in one body;' then he adds: 'teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to God.' He immediately goes on to explain what it means to sing to God: 'And whatever you do in word or in deed, do it all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, through him giving thanks to God the Father.'[93] A person who gives thanks for all things never clashes with the will of God and thus the body accords with the head. Similarly when each member of the body maintains his own place, performs his proper function, and uses the endowment granted to him by the Spirit for the benefit of all, then there is no discord among men – for example, when a wife obeys her husband and the husband loves his wife as Christ loves his church; when children show obedience to their parents and fathers exercise their authority over their children with forbearance; when servants sincerely aim to please their masters[94] and the masters treat them in a way which shows they are aware that, although these people have a servile position, they are brothers according to their calling.

It would not be absurd, moreover, to interpret wind music as being that which causes every prayer we make to accord with God's commandments, and percussion music as that which makes all our actions harmonize

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93 Col 3:14–17
94 Cf Eph 5:22–5, 6:1, 6:5.

with his will. This is what the apostle seems to be suggesting when he says, 'in word or in deed,' for the word resonates and the deed has repercussions like an instrument.[95] The harmony is also spoiled when a man's words fail to harmonize with his real feelings or when his deed does not accord with his words. Those who perform before a human audience prepare their instrument carefully; but if we wish our music to please a divine audience, we must adjust our heart, that is our thoughts, and must tune its strings, in other words our feelings, correctly: this is done if we strive for the glory of Christ and our neighbour's benefit. Do you wish to know how to tune this lyre properly? Paul, who was far greater than that Idythun, shows you how when he writes: 'Whether you eat or drink or do anything else, do everything to the glory of God.'[96] Once the instrument of our mind has been tuned in this way, it will produce that beautiful melody which Paul describes thus: 'Finally, my brothers, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is just, whatever is holy, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute; if there be any virtue, if there be any respect for discipline, think on these things and do what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.'[97]

And so all music which is not in harmony with the will of the Spirit or with the precepts of Holy Scripture is disagreeable and displeasing to God. It is even more unpleasant if we spoil the music to which we ought to tune the strings of our feelings, wickedly distorting it to our own desires. Some people's lyre produces only sounds which accord with this world, in other words with making money, flattery, and public acclaim. In case any of you do not understand this properly, I shall use an example to clarify my meaning. I heard someone giving a sermon about the answer which the Virgin Mary gave to the angel: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.'[98] The preacher interpreted each word as indicating one of the Virgin's particular virtues (I think I am right in saying that he derived this interpretation from St Bernard),[99] but there were two strings which spoiled his well-tuned lyre. For when he had explained that the words 'according to thy word' were a sign of the Virgin's faith, he

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95 Gordon 178–80 and 284 n100 points out that Erasmus uses the word *pulsare* not only in a musical context but also frequently to describe the action of grace, as eg in *Hyperaspistes* (CWE 77).

96 1 Cor 10:31

97 Phil 4:8–9

98 Luke 1:38

99 Bernard of Clairvaux *In nativitate Beatae Mariae Virginis sermo* PL 183 444

added, in commendation of papal indulgences: 'Anyone who wants the indulgences to benefit him must believe that it is in the power of the pope at Rome to snatch from hell any soul he chooses and to place it immediately in heaven.'[100] At the same time he used the posture of his whole body to emphasize his meaning, first lowering his right arm as far as possible and bending his body right down, and then stretching his arm up high. Without doubt these two strings – of a desire for profit and for adulation – vitiated a melody which was otherwise in tune. The lyre players appointed by our David are not like this: these are more like the inhabitants of Aspendos who are the subject of the joke in the old proverb[101] because they played with their instrument turned inwards, in other words, 'they serve their own belly' as the apostle says, 'not Jesus Christ.'[102] Some people destroy the divine harmony by using the wrong instruments, which are not appropriate to it, as when they corrupt the heavenly wisdom with human philosophy or when they mix heretical errors with true doctrine. Origen was a lyre player of this type, and so were Tertullian and Arius who ruined their whole song because a single string was badly out of tune. Others spoil the simplicity of the music by trying to be oversubtle. The Spartans are praised for having banished Timothy of Miletus from their territory because he added one string to his lyre and thus made his music more complicated.[103] But more serious is the offence committed by people who corrupt the divine teaching with unnecessary subtleties and affectations and complexities.

The writings of the Fathers contain many complaints about churchmen who used the charm of their delivery and frequent exclamations to try to win the applause of the ignorant congregation. Rhetorical training is responsible for this error. The pursuit of eloquence is traditionally followed by the study of philosophy, especially Aristotelian philosophy, but this corrupts the divine music as much as rhetoric does: some people, keen to show off their penetrating intellect, have adulterated it with so much irrelevant and complicated material that, in comparison, Aristotelian philosophy appears simple and straightforward. Even nowadays the wretched Jews do not play with any skill; they refuse to join the choir because their lyre is not in tune, while they assiduously strike the string produc-

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100 For the contemporary debate about papal jurisdiction over purgatory, see Peter Marshall *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford 2002) 47–92.

101 Cf *Adagia* II i 30: *Intus canere, Aspendius citharoedus*; *In psalmum 4* CWE 63 214 n234; Cicero *In Verrem* 2.1.20.

102 Cf Rom 16:18.

103 Cf Boethius *De musica* 1.1 PL 63 1169–70.

ing the lowest note, in other words, the literal sense, although there cannot be any harmony unless the low notes are combined with high notes and the historical sense is perfectly attuned to the allegorical interpretation. At times Origen's playing is devoid of harmony when he produces the sounds of allegory but scorns the literal meaning; but the playing of the Jews is the most dispiriting because they just harp on at the historical sense.

Not even the music which a Christian produces is pleasing to God unless the whole man is in harmony with himself and the outer man accords with the inner. Paul sang in tune when he said: 'I will sing with the spirit, I will sing with the understanding, too. I will pray with the spirit, I shall pray also with the understanding.'[104] But what sort of melody is produced if the tongue sings God's praises while the heart is plotting revenge against one's neighbour, or if the voice sings of heavenly things while the mind is planning wicked deeds? A man whose body abstains from food although his mind does not abstain from sin, also sings out of tune. The same is true of the person who restrains his flesh from lust but cannot keep his thoughts pure and free from pride, anger and other sinful feelings. Finally, it was shrewdly said by the ancient writers that all the virtues are connected, like the clamps used in building:[105] when they are in harmony, they produce a most delightful melody.

Those who interpret the books of the New Testament in such a way that they reject the Old Testament and make the God of the Old Testament different from that of the New, they, too, have a lyre which is not in tune. This is true also of those who accept some of the books of the scriptural canon but not others, even though all the books harmonize one with another.[106] I think that those who value faith so highly that they scorn works also ought to be reckoned as bad lyre players; on the other hand, this also applies to people who set such great store by works that they neglect the things which are essential for piety.[107] In addition, we may regard as unskilful lyre players those who are so bound by the rules and regulations devised

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104 1 Cor 14:15

105 On the theory that the virtues are all connected, see eg Cicero *De finibus* 5.23.67.

106 On the theme of discord between different groups of Christians and their beliefs, see *In psalmum 33* CWE 64 321.

107 Here Erasmus stresses the importance of a delicate balance between faith and works. Cf *De puritate tabernaculi* 246 below, where Erasmus finds fault with those who lavish extraordinary praise on faith.

by men that they are forced to violate God's commandments; or those, on the other hand, who scorn all the regulations imposed by men while zealously upholding what God has prescribed; and the same is true of people who emphasize spiritual things but condemn all rituals indiscriminately.[108]

At this point let me recall what I touched upon earlier, on the subject of the functions of the individual members and their order. How can there be such harmony in the body unless it is because the hand does not demand to be an ear nor the foot an eye nor the stomach a hand nor the eye a nose? Nature has granted to each its proper place, connecting it up closely to the muscles at that point and assigning a particular function to each member. What confusion is caused when a limb is dislocated! How disastrous it is if a person is forced to use his hand instead of his feet or his feet as hands or if, as happens to some people when they are ill, the urine and faeces are passed out through the mouth. Similar chaos would ensue in human affairs if ordinary people were to give orders to those in authority, if the laws respected personal interests, if rulers engaged in business deals, if bishops took over government, if theologians were to make false accusations, if the popes waged war, if monks devoted themselves to pleasure and farmers staged a revolt. And so, in passing we have perhaps touched on a few of the sources of that discordant music we experience in our time and whose existence in Christendom we deplore.

Indeed, are not bodily desires often at variance with one another, thereby making the music not just unpleasant to listen to but actually worthless – for example, when the string of greed tries to drown the sound produced by the string of lust, or when the sound of ambition interferes with that of greed, or that of self-indulgence and idleness tries to drown the sound of ambition? Less wretched is the man who is consistently bad. The distress caused by this discordant symphony has been elegantly described by the writer of Ecclesiasticus; he says: 'The heart of the fool is like the wheel of a cart and like a revolving axle are the workings of his mind.'[109] Similarly, Solomon writes: 'The indolent man both wants and does not want.'[110] Can you imagine anything more annoying or distressing than such conflict among the desires? Idythun is present and true concord exists only where the peace of God exists, which passes all understanding and keeps

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108 Erasmus' Latin here, 'alba, quod aiunt, amussi damnant omnes ceremonias,' echoes *Adagia* I v 88: *Amussis alba*.

109 Ecclus 33:5

110 Prov 13:4

the hearts and minds of men in Christ Jesus.[111] It is from the heart that life derives,[112] and man protects his heart in vain if the Lord does not guard it.

A further point is that it is often the case that where drums are mentioned in Scripture, mention is also made of a chorus. A chorus is a piece of music performed by a number of people singing in harmony and no music is more pleasing to the divine ears. This is what the Lord says, in the words of St Paul: 'Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.'[113] He says the same thing in the twelfth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans[114] and also when he writes to the Corinthians: 'I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all say the same thing and that there be no divisions among you. But be perfect in the same mind and in the same judgment.'[115] The master of concord was deeply offended by those discordant sounds: 'I belong to Paul, I belong to Apollo, I belong to Cephas, and I belong to Christ.'[116] 'God is the God of peace, not of disorder.'[117] 'His praise is in the churches of the holy,'[118] in other words, in the congregation of the faithful, not in the disagreement of the wicked. 'For there is no peace for the wicked,'[119] says the Lord, and where there is no peace, there can certainly be no chorus. One can hear the symphony and chorus of the gospels in the house of the Lord: all those inside rejoice with the same joy, while anyone who is outside is tortured by jealousy. But how can anyone who sincerely loves the beauty of God's house refrain from tears when he considers how nowadays even people who are reckoned to be Christians do not produce a harmonious song? What diverse sounds are to be heard everywhere, sounds which are not only out of harmony with the lyre of David but are even out of tune with each other! If only the Lord would grant all of them one heart and one soul.[120] Then all of us together, our voices united in the house of the Lord, could produce a harmonious sound, performing spiritual songs for him; then we might together reach that heavenly church

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111 Cf Phil 4:7.
112 Prov 4:23
113 Phil 2:2
114 Rom 12:10, 16
115 1 Cor 1:10
116 1 Cor 1:12
117 1 Cor 14:33
118 Ps 149:1
119 Isa 48:22, 57:21
120 Cf Acts 4:32.

where the God of Sabaoth is praised with continual hymns and where there is no discord among the voices.

Hitherto we have been concerned to give an explanation – as far as the Lord has granted – of the mystery of the prophetic lyre and of the name Idythun. We shall now move on quickly to deal with the psalm itself once we have made two more comments regarding the title. First, the word which is translated in the Septuagint as 'to the end,' is given as 'for the victory of Idythun' or 'for the victor Idythun' by those who prefer to follow the Hebrew sources. For it is thought that competitions were held among the singers in the temple, with prizes offered for the winner. As Idythun had won this competition, David composed this song for him, revealing the mystery of the spiritual victory. The prize for this victory is no calf or libation bowl, which is what the winners in the Olympic games used to receive, but rather eternal life. It is the Lord who is in charge of the games:[121] his judgment is never wrong and he does not break his promises.

Admittedly there is a difference between 'to the end' and 'for the victory' but the meaning in both cases comes to the same thing. For Christ is the end of the Law so that all who have faith may be justified,[122] and thus anyone who leaps across from the letter to the spirit has overcome the world through Christ and has risen above the righteousness of the Pharisees; he joins Idythun in singing a beautiful song in the temple, in the presence of the Lord. The Lord detests the songs of the Jews because they keep tenaciously to the Law but do not acknowledge Christ as the end of the Law. They find it hard to enter the house of a kind father and prefer to produce sounds which interfere with the harmony of those who sing and rejoice in chorus, rather than taking part in the singing and rejoicing.

Secondly, there are a number of psalms whose titles indicate the subject of the narrative, but this is not the case with the title of this psalm. Some Hebrew scholars suggest that this psalm contains a prophecy of the misfortunes which were to befall the people of Israel during the Babylonian captivity. It is for others to decide how much credence ought to be given to this suggestion: it is after all only human guesswork. The conjecture put forward by others seems nearer the truth, namely that this psalm refers to the story of how Shimei insulted David in a very insolent manner. It was not only cruel of him to allow his tongue to rage against a man in distress, but also insane to provoke the king with bitter taunts, seeing that the king was

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121 The term Erasmus uses is *agonothetes*. Cf *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 114 n551, and also his use of the term *choragus* CWE 64 114 n550.

122 Rom 10:4

capable of killing him and paying him back for the insults with death.[123] And indeed that abusive man would surely have been put to death, had not David restrained the hand of Abishai. But Shimei was related to Saul, which is why this long-standing enmity still existed, for it appears that the evil spirit which the Lord sent to afflict Saul had descended upon Shimei too. Otherwise he was just asking for death, for he was the only person who dared to throw stones and to hurl abuse more injurious than stones at David, who was not only the king but also surrounded on all sides by troops of very brave soldiers. A king cannot bear any slander, and when he finds himself in a distressing situation he is more likely to take revenge in his anger. The memory of Saul could have made Shimei's insults even more galling, for Saul had never ceased to try to bring about David's death in return for the excellent deeds which David had performed. But Shimei, in his rage, was not content to assault the king with stones: he hurled stones at all the king's servants, scattering these missiles all over the ground, as he shouted from the opposite side: 'Go away, go away, you man of blood, you man of Belial. The Lord has avenged upon you all the blood of the house of Saul because you have usurped his kingdom. See, the Lord has handed over the kingdom to your son Absalom. Look, how your troubles oppress you, for you are a man of blood.' But Abishai could not allow such impudence to go unchecked: 'Why should this dog, who is about to die, curse my lord the king?' he said. 'I shall go over and cut off his head.'[124] If someone were unfamiliar with the rest of the story, would he not expect at this point that some sort of splendid reward would be offered for this man's remarkable devotion to his king? But David – so many centuries before the coming of Christianity – presents a perfect example of Christian mercy and responds with a rebuke instead of a reward. 'What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? Let him curse me for the Lord has commanded him to curse David. Who then dares to say: "Why has he done this?"'[125] And so it would not be absurd, I maintain, to understand the abusive Shimei (in whom proud Saul's deadly hatred was still alive) as representing the sinner opposing the righteous man. In reaction to his abuse David not only held his tongue to prevent himself retaliating with insults, but he even defended this man raging in hatred. And in an unparalleled manifestation of mercy he forgave this abusive man but reprimanded the one who wished him well. For the words, 'What have I to do with you?' are those of someone rejecting friendly behaviour if it goes beyond the bounds of what is

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123 Cf 2 Kings/2 Sam 16:13.
124 2 Kings/2 Sam 16:7–9
125 2 Kings/2 Sam 16:10

right. Similarly when Peter, out of his concern as a friend, expressed his desire that Christ should not die, he was told: 'Get behind me, Satan. You do not understand the things of God,'[126] and Peter was again rebuked when he drew his sword to protect the Lord against the wicked soldier.[127]

But I am not sure whether the whole psalm refers to this episode; it is not safe to rely on human conjecture, especially as there is nothing more uninspired than the stories of the Jews. Besides, a psalm does not necessarily always have a historical subject. Sometimes its subject is derived from some passage in the Old Testament, as this one for example appears to be derived partly from Job, partly from Ecclesiastes; in fact, many elements are combined, each of which receives a more complete explanation from its original context. It seems that the more bitter complaints are borrowed from Job while the lament about the vanity of human affairs is taken from Ecclesiastes. The psalm does indeed have a Jewish tone to it in that it contains laments and complaints, whereas after the coming of the grace of the gospel everything is more joyful. It may be that the man who composed this psalm was perfect and perhaps also the man who performed it; nevertheless, in this psalm we are presented with a character who is still involved in a grave struggle with temptation and who is in a dangerous situation. Nor does the psalm have a happy ending: it not only starts in sorrow – and in the course of it the distress increases – but it also ends in lamentation.

On the whole it seems to me to apply to someone who, as a result of the most grievous sufferings and despair, rejects all forms of assistance offered by this world and turns with his whole heart to Christ alone. In fact this is a penitential psalm, as is the previous one. For the preceding psalm contains only the grief and prayers of a man who regrets his own actions: it begins with a shudder of fear, 'O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,' and ends in the same way with the words, 'Do not forsake me, O Lord, O my God.'[128] Similarly in Psalm 38 mention is made of a violent struggle with the enemy, and the man, deprived of all human assistance, is forced to seek refuge with God who is the cause of all his suffering.

In fact the two psalms are in accord with each other on a large number of other points too. In Psalm 38 it is the sinner who opposes David, while in Psalm 37 it is his friends and companions who approach him and take their stand against him. In Psalm 38 he puts a restraint on his mouth; in Psalm 37 like the deaf he does not hear and like the dumb he does not open his mouth. In the same psalm his heart is said to throb in pain, while in the

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126 Matt 16:23
127 Cf Matt 26:51–2; Mark 14:47–8.
128 Ps 37:2, 22/38:1, 21

next psalm his heart became hot within him. In Psalm 38 he laments that he has been made an object of scorn to the fool, or prays that he might not become one; in the preceding psalm he prays that his enemies might never have occasion to exult over him. In that same psalm he is close to despair and cries out: 'Do not forsake me,' while in Psalm 38 he prays: 'Let me go, that I might find relief.'[129]

In short, the two psalms correspond on every other point too, although it is only the heading of Psalm 38 which mentions the victory which he is hoping for, as one may understand when he says: 'And what do I wait for, if not the Lord?'[130] Hope of victory is well founded whenever a person who has no confidence in any other form of assistance turns with his whole being to God. Moreover, no one will receive the crown of victory unless he has competed according to the rules.[131] This victory is more fully described in the following psalm,[132] for the themes of this one also correspond to those of the two previous psalms. In Psalm 38, when the gentle breeze of hope begins to blow from heaven amidst the storms of trouble, he says: 'And what do I wait for, if not the Lord?'[133] In Psalm 39 his words are: 'I have waited patiently for the Lord, and he heard me. And he listened to my prayers and drew me out of the pit of desolation and the soft and sticky earth. And he put a new song in my mouth, a song to our God.'[134] This is indeed a true victory hymn, sung once victory has been gained. Admittedly we shall not be allowed to sing this song perfectly as long as we remain on active service in this earthy tent which is our body. Our happiness is contaminated by sorrow or fear and our songs resemble the one found in the works of that writer of Old Comedy: 'Oh alas, alas!'[135] For here, even when the victory is attained through the Lord's mercy, one may still expect further attacks from the enemy, so it is not possible to rest; instead one must be forever watchful and on guard, standing ready for battle. That ancient Greek proverb[136] is also relevant here, for 'the righteous man falls seven times a day but rises again.'[137]

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129 Pss 37:22/38:21, 38:14/39:13
130 Ps 38:8/39:7
131 2 Tim 2:5
132 Ps 39/40
133 Ps 38:8/39:7
134 Ps 39:2–4/40:2–3
135 Aristophanes *Pax* 486, 488, 495
136 Cf Euripides *Phoenissae* 1572; *Adagia* I vii 63: *Omnium rerum vicissitudo est*, where this proverb is quoted in the discussion of the adage; and *Adagia* IV vii 49: *Mars communis*.
137 Prov 24:16

In my opinion there is nothing to prevent one applying this psalm [38] to Christ, the head of the church, or to the church itself, the mystical body of Christ, or to the prophets, apostles, and bishops who are the pillars and leaders of the church, or to any one individual fighting under the banner of Christ. We can imagine a man who is wearied by the ingratitude and malice of the wicked and considers abandoning his desire to do good. At last, when his mental agonies become overpowering, in his weariness with life he seeks an end to his suffering in death; but he recovers from this state of despair, partly by reflecting on the nature of human existence (which, despite being so miserable, is at least very short and cannot torment us for long) and partly by a consideration of divine mercy, which does not allow people to be tempted beyond their strength, although it sometimes uses terrible sufferings to test its subjects; with the temptation God also provides the means to endure it.[138] We know that Christ was thoroughly tested and tempted in every way,[139] and it is well known, too, that Paul was troubled by so many misfortunes that he was occasionally overcome with weariness of this life. We are also aware of the violent disturbances suffered by the church in the past and even today: in fact, it would altogether cease to exist without Christ's powerful support. Finally, anyone can experience within himself the truth of the apostle's words: 'Those who wish to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution'[140] from those who love this world.

We, however, shall try to bring our explanation into line with the last interpretation, without being bound by the authority of any one person – especially as this psalm has been interpreted in a greater variety of ways than almost any other. For we have always preferred a straightforward interpretation of Holy Scripture, one that does least violence to the text. We just pray to our Lord to tune the lyre of my tongue and prepare your minds so that while I lead the singing, you may be the prophetic choir, leaping and dancing with spiritual joy. Then we may both become as Idythun, leaping over the hills of this world, laying aside the burden of our sins, and jumping over the mountains of the heroic virtues until we arrive at the contemplation of the God of gods in Sion.[141] Amen.

'I have said, I shall guard my ways': The opening of the psalm seems abrupt so as to make you understand that, after a lengthy and agitated deliberation, the suffering of the restless soul at last bursts forth with these words.

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138 Cf 1 Cor 10:13.
139 Heb 4:15
140 2 Tim 3:12
141 Cf Ps 83:8/84:7.

This is the sort of thing expressed by the exclamation, 'what then shall I do?' which occurs frequently in ancient comedy.[142] For a man in distress is assailed by many things from all sides, and as the storms of misfortune sweep over him from every direction, he looks round to see if there is any means of escape or any remedy for his suffering. In fact, those who experience great sorrow wish to be left alone: weary, as it were, of involvement with their fellow men among whom they experience so much wickedness, they like to talk to themselves and, if nothing else, at least to relieve the bitterness of their suffering as best they can by shedding abundant tears.

It is said that something of this kind was experienced by a man called Timon,[143] an Athenian who was reduced to utter destitution by those who flattered him and pretended to be his friends; as a result he came to hate the entire human race and admitted no one to his company. In the same way Idythun here is sick of talking to men in whom he finds no sense. The waves of suffering have upset him and he has perhaps not yet turned his thoughts to God. His words are: 'I have said.' To whom has he said it? To whom if not to himself? And so he has already established something, for no one lies to himself: a person who speaks to himself speaks sincerely. It is customary for orators, after they have delivered the final part of their speech, to add, 'I have spoken,' just as the editor of comedy added, 'I Calliopius have revised this.'[144] But here the speaker begins with these words to make us realize that, after making a careful consideration of the problem, he has at last decided in favour of one of a number of different plans. For the word *dixi* not only indicates that his deliberation has come to an end but also makes it clear that he has made a definite decision. Similarly Phormio, in Terence's comedy, uses the word to mean 'that's my last word, Demipho.'[145] In fact, even the Holy Scriptures often make use of this particular figure of speech to signify an irrevocable decision, as, for example, 'says the Lord Almighty.'[146] And so, when he has made his decision to take one of a number of possible courses of action, he says 'I have spoken,' for

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142 Eg Terence's *Phormio*

143 For the story of the misanthrope Timon, see eg Aristophanes *Lysistrata* 808–20 and Lucian's dialogue *Timon, or The Misanthrope*.

144 Calliopius was a grammarian of the fourth century AD who edited Terence's comedies. Cf LB V 431 n1; *De recta pronuntiatione* ASD I-4 60:n on line 541; and CWE 421.

145 Terence *Phormio* 439

146 Cf 2 Cor 6:18.

he believes that he has found some kind of remedy for his sufferings, a remedy which he can provide himself. What is it? 'I shall guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue.' This is not what a foolish person says when he experiences similar mental turmoil and reflects on the fact that good men are afflicted by many misfortunes while the wicked, on the other hand, prosper in this world and enjoy wealth, honours, pleasures, and the other attractions which life offers; concluding that human affairs are turned upside down at random and at the whim of fortune, he says in his heart There is no God,[147] or if there is a God, he has no interest in the lives of men. Idythun, however, speaks far more wisely in his heart in a similar state of mental turmoil: he says, 'I have said, I shall guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue.' The wise man becomes more sensible in misfortune while the fool is reckless in prosperity and adversity alike.

It appears that this person Idythun has both erred with his tongue and been wounded by men's tongues. As a result, just as someone who has once been stung by a scorpion believes that there is one asleep beneath every stone,[148] so a person who has provoked the tongues of slanderers against himself by the errors of his tongue is afraid even of things which hold no danger;[149] he watches warily all his actions, in case something should catch him unawares if he is not careful, and he echoes the words of the blessed Job, 'I shall fear all my works.'[150]

'That I may not sin with my tongue': These words can be interpreted in two ways. First they may mean: 'I shall keep a careful watch on my thoughts, plans, and judgments, in case anything should slip from my tongue which should not have been uttered.' For the heart is the source of all thoughts and that is why the wise man gives this stern warning: 'Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it life proceeds.'[151] A sensible person is therefore quick to listen but slow to speak;[152] he considers his thoughts with great care and restrains them for a long time to prevent them bursting forth on his tongue. For as long as they are held down firmly in the heart, they not only cause less harm but are also more likely to be cured. And so whenever the heart is seething with envy, hatred, anger, desire for revenge, with lust or some such emotion, the safest course is to maintain silence.

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147 Cf Ps 13/14:1.
148 *Adagia* I iv 34: *Sub omni lapide scorpius dormit*. Cf Ep 2615:353–4.
149 Cf Virgil *Aeneid* 4.298: 'omnia tuta timens.'
150 Job 9:28
151 Prov 4:23
152 James 1:19

On the other hand, these words might mean: 'I shall keep such a careful watch on all my thoughts that I shall not sin even with my tongue.' He is aware that the tongue, placed as it is in a moist environment, is slippery and that no other part of the body is more difficult to restrain from going wrong in some way, even if a person is very careful in his desire to speak kindly. Moreover, in cases where human carelessness allows something to slip out which would have been better left unsaid, the human mind is so perverse and has such a tendency to make unfair criticisms that it is not content to speak ill of someone but feels it must exaggerate the mistake which Christian kindness ought to overlook. And it is not enough for slander to distort the truth and give it a wicked interpretation; it also – and this is the most wicked thing of all – falsely imputes something which was neither said nor thought. For the tongue and the pen are used for the same purpose, the only difference being that what is written has a more widespread usefulness and people are bound by it more firmly than by what is said. The tongue very often anticipates thought and is in this way more prone to mistakes, while a slip of the tongue is usually pardoned. Men are more firmly bound and convicted by what is written, as by a bond or surety. And so it is extremely difficult for a man who speaks or writes much to guarantee (in the words of Solomon) that his utterances are at all times full of wisdom and that he does not occasionally deviate from the truth.[153] Admittedly it is not enough to speak the truth unless you also speak in the right way and at the right time and in the right company: for many things are lawful which are not expedient,[154] and a man who says the right things but not in the right way is also guilty of error. He who does not offend in word is perfect, says James.[155] It is one thing to be a man but it is far greater to be a perfect man. I do not know whether any one can be found among the whole race of mortals who has never offended in word – apart from Christ alone; or whether there is any book, among all the categories of writing which exist, which is free from any hint of error, apart from the scriptural canon which is as incapable of error as the Holy Spirit itself by whose inspiration it was produced. For if we set aside the pagan philosophers, who were no more than human, which of those writers whose works glorify the church will you allow to have been so wary or fortunate that he

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153 Cf Prov 10:19.
154 Cf 1 Cor 6:12.
155 James 3:2

nowhere lets slip anything which could justly be criticized or in some way misrepresented?[156]

Origen was one of the great teachers of the church and his writings were a source of inspiration to almost all the Greek Fathers; in addition, he was the son of a martyr and he himself sought to attain martyrdom. And yet are not many things to be found in this man's writings which are more than heretical?[157] The cause of his downfall was Platonic philosophy.[158] The part that Origen played for Greece, where he successfully aroused a passion for the Scriptures, Tertullian played for Africa: he was a man highly educated in every branch of learning, a man of penetrating intellect and sharp judgment,[159] but his devotion to the ideal of virginity caused him to fall headlong into the error that condemned second marriages. This was a result not so much of his falling into the errors of Montanus' teaching but of his sympathy with the Montanist sect, from which he later cut himself off, though in a way that prevented him from being reconciled to the Catholic church.

Who was holier than Cyprian or closer to the spirit of the apostles?[160] Yet even he was not free from error because of his belief that those who had been baptized by heretics must be baptized again. This error of his was shared by many other bishops.

Irenaeus was very well educated in all branches of learning and so familiar with the divine writings that you might think that he had read nothing else, and one can see from the way in which he handled the question of the Catholic faith that he loved what he taught; and yet he lapsed into the doctrines of the Chiliasts and his teachings on the subject of the resurrection did not conform in all respects to the present doctrines of the Catholic church.[161]

Hardly anyone has been considered more saintly and free from all error than Ambrose, bishop of Milan, but even in his writings quite a number of points can be found to conflict with the teachings of the church.[162] One

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156 On accepting the lack of harmony among views of the church Fathers, see *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-5 200:6–12; and Chomarat I 547 n189.
157 Jerome *De viris illustribus* 54 PL 23 (1845) 663–7.
158 See Screech 21.
159 Jerome *De viris illustribus* 53 pl 23 (1845) 661
160 Ibidem 67 PL 23 (1845) 677
161 Ibidem 35 PL 23 (1845) 649–51
162 Ibidem 124 PL 23 (1845) 711

of these is the passage noted by Jerome where Ambrose uses the most tortuous allegories to distort Peter's crime in denying Christ so as to be able to praise him for his behaviour in this incident.[163] The fact is that if Peter did not deny Christ, then Christ himself was lying when he foretold that Peter would deny him three times; and he who does not recognize Christ as a man (which is what Ambrose was doing) is as guilty of error as the person who does not recognize him as God. I know that Ambrose did not mean to make a blasphemous statement here; his minor error lies only in the form of words used. For this writer allowed his intellect remarkably free play in his use of allegory, and even though he did so in a spirit of devotion to God, if someone with evil intentions should comment on this work, Ambrose would not avoid a charge of calumny and blasphemy.

The interpretation he gives when commenting on the seventh chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians is not contained in the words themselves. Ambrose allows the man who has divorced his wife on the grounds of adultery to marry again but he does not allow the woman to do the same;[164] yet according to St Augustine and St Jerome the wife has the same rights as her husband under matrimonial law. In his commentary on the seventh chapter of the first letter to the Corinthians Ambrose writes: 'When he says that the appointed time is short, and the rest, Paul means that the end of the world is at hand, although he knows that there is still time left; but he was right not to express himself differently, for the sake of those who will read these things when there is very little time left.' Ambrose goes on: 'What is said is of great value even though it is still a long way off,' and so forth.[165] If some unscrupulous person should try to interpret this passage, will he not declare it to be full of error in that Ambrose condones a lie told for the sake of some advantage? Will he not declare it to be blasphemous in that Ambrose accuses Paul of lying? For what is it if not a lie to say that a very long period is short? Ambrose believed that Paul was well aware of this.

I shall not discuss Lactantius, for it might perhaps be said that he ought not to be included on the official list of the Doctors of the church. As for

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163 Ambrose *Expositio Evangelii secundum Lucam* X 74–90 (on verse 57) PL 15 (1845) 1822–6, Jerome *Commentaria in Evangelium S. Matthaei* (on Matt 26:72) PL 26 (1845) 203

164 This passage is now attributed to Ambrosiaster rather than to Ambrose; see *Commentaria in epistolam ad Corinthios primam* 7 (on verse 11) in *Appendix ad opera Ambrosii* PL 17 (1845) 218.

165 Ibidem (on verse 29) PL 17 (1845) 222.

Jerome, that outstanding pillar of the church, in his letter to Oceanus[166] he pours scorn on a belief which the church asserted in the past and firmly maintains today and he calls it the heresy of Cain: this is the belief that anyone who married before being baptized and who, when his wife died, married for a second time after his baptism, should be debarred from the priesthood for having married twice, as the church bars from the priesthood anyone who unknowingly marries as a virgin a woman who is not.[167]

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166 Jerome Ep 69 CSEL 54 679

167 The heresy of Cain was the denial of the efficacy of Christ's atonement by refusing to believe that baptism washed away all sins. The background here is that both married and unmarried men (including widowers) might be called to receive major Orders. Jerome makes it clear that this was the universal discipline in both East and West (*Adversus Jovinianum* 1 34; PL 23 257A–C; *Apologia ad Pammachium* Ep 49:21 PL 22). Married candidates had to be monogamous, and men who had married more than once (ie after the death of a first spouse) and thus were 'digamists' were excluded. Further, a priest who married could not marry a woman who had been married or had carnal intercourse earlier. The insistence was that those chosen for the deaconate and higher ranks of the clergy had to have demonstrated their capacity for chastity in a monogamous marriage, as they would be required to practise perfect continence after ordination (see 1 Tim 3:2, 12 and Titus 1:6 for the scriptural foundation).
The Latin Fathers insisted that a marriage contracted before baptism was still a marriage and subject therefore to the Pauline injunction, so that the practice in the West was to exclude even those who had contracted their first marriage before having received baptism. Pope Leo (440–61) wrote that the Pauline injunctions cited above would apply regardless, 'lest anyone should believe himself able to attain to the priesthood who has taken a wife before he obtained the grace of Christ and on her decease joined himself to another after baptism' (PL 54 618C; English translation from *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church* 2nd series, ed H. Wace and P. Schaff [1890–1900] XII 5). The Greek practice was instead to impede men who were digamists only *after* baptism, since baptism washes away all sin and iniquity and the manner of life led before receiving the sacrament was by implication of no consequence.
The Greek view was held also by Jerome, as is seen in his letter to Oceanus, written about 397 (Ep 69 CSEL 54 679:6, 680:11–12). Oceanus had expressed surprise that a man who had remarried after his baptism had been admitted to the episcopate. Jerome answered that there was nothing contrary in that to the commandments of St Paul, on the ground that the first marriage of the man in question preceded his baptism, and consequently could not be taken into account. It is in Jerome's reply that the reference to Cainite heresy appears: 'The heresy of the Cainites (*Caina haeresis*) raises its head ... This heresy declares that there are some sins which Christ cannot cleanse with his blood, and

In his commentary on chapter four of the Epistle to the Galatians, Jerome writes: 'He is right, too, to say that the man who is born according to the flesh persecutes the spiritual man. For the spiritual man never persecutes the man who lives according to the flesh but forgives him as if he were his ignorant brother,' and so on.[168] Might not someone who takes pleasure in calumny[169] declare that Jerome is here depriving bishops of their right to pursue heretics and kings of their right to wage war against the Turks?[170] Also in his commentary on this fourth chapter of the same epistle he says: 'It is of course absurd that Moses and the others who conversed with God were in that position,'[171] and so on. If people today were to find a similar statement in contemporary writings, would they not tear their clothes and shout 'blasphemy, blasphemy' at the top of their voices?

A similar example is to be found in Jerome's commentary on the Epistle to Philemon where he writes: 'It would take too long to review the various exploits of the Judges and to trace the whole story of Samson's life down to the mystery of the true sun,'[172] for he refers to the sacred history as a story, although it is the height of impiety to doubt its authenticity.[173]

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that the scars left by old transgressions on the body and the soul are sometimes so deep that they cannot be effaced by the remedy which he supplies.' Addressing Oceanus' expressed concern, he continues: 'You are of the opinion that he has violated the precept of the Apostle, who in his list of episcopal qualifications commands that a bishop shall be "the husband of one wife." I am surprised that you have pilloried an individual when the whole world is filled with persons ordained in similar circumstances [*cum omnis mundus his ordinationibus plenus sit*].' Jerome then refers to the precepts of Timothy and Titus on the importance of restricting the clerical office to monogamists, pointing out that the Apostle could be speaking only of those who had been baptized.

Erasmus' assertion that the church 'firmly maintains today' the belief scorned by Jerome is mysterious, as the regulation of ordaining men married only once after baptism had by his time long been a dead letter in the West.

168 Jerome *Commentaria in epistolam ad Galatas* 2.4 (on Gal 4:29) PL 26 (1845) 393

169 In the following section Erasmus ironically contrasts the fluidity of the patristic interpretations with the rigidity of contemporary heresy hunters.

170 Cf *De bello Turcico* CWE 64 239–40, 252 and n217; *Paraphrase on Matt* LB VII 80E–F.

171 Jerome *Commentaria in epistolam ad Galatas* 2.4 (on Gal 4:8–9) PL 26 (1845) 376

172 Jerome *Commentaria in epistolam ad Philemon* (on verse 4) PL 26 (1845) 609

173 Bietenholz *History and Biography* 147 notes that Erasmus had an unusually clear perception of the distinction between historical figures and, for example, the heroes of epic tradition; but even Erasmus would not deny the historicity of any of the contents of the Bible.

With reference to the same chapter he writes: 'So the Father ought to be above all things because he is the creator of all things,'[174] and so on. If you interpret 'all things' literally, surely people are likely to think it a blasphemous statement, implying that the Father is the creator of the Son and the Spirit? But if you take it to mean 'of all created things,' will they not say that the Son and Holy Spirit are also the source of all created things? (I refer to those who do not believe there is any difference between the terms originator and creator.)

Similarly in chapter five Jerome says: 'The difference between pagan and Christian rulers is that pagan ones lord it over their subjects while we Christians serve our subjects.'[175] Might not some captious critic say that these words serve to deprive Christian kings of their authority?

In his work on the first chapter of the Epistle to Titus Jerome asserts that Paul was ignorant of the Greek language and that he was unable to explain the deeper meanings because of his linguistic deficiencies.[176] A critical reader might accuse Jerome of blasphemy at this point, seeing that it was the Holy Spirit which granted Paul skill at speaking and the gift of tongues.

In the first book against Jovinian[177] Jerome writes that the church was founded upon all the apostles and to all of them were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the strength of the church was based on them all equally. In the dialogue against the Luciferians he says that baptism cannot be given without the Eucharist and a little later in the same work he says that heretics must be left alone until the end of the world, adding: 'No one may assume Christ's role, no one may judge men before the day of judgment. If the church has already been cleansed, what are we saving for the Lord? There is a path which appears to men to be straight, but the end of it leads into the depths of hell. In this error of judgment what unerring discernment can there be?' etc.[178] It is quite clear what a fuss could be made over this passage by those who are so pedantic in deciding what Jerome's meaning is, what the implications are, and what the standing or lying proposition means.

In his letter to Nepotianus on the subject of the priestly life Jerome states that the clergy must wear neither white nor black garments and he

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174 Jerome *Commentaria in epistolam ad Ephesios* 2.4 (on Eph 4:6) PL 26 (1845) 497
175 Ibidem 3.5 (on Eph 5:21) PL 26 (1845) 530
176 Jerome *Commentaria in epistolam ad Titum* (on verse 2) PL 26 (1845) 558
177 Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.26 PL 23 (1845) 247
178 Jerome *Dialogus contra Luciferianos* 21 PL 23 (1845) 175

condemns the use of linen garments.[179] In the same letter he forbids the clergy all ownership. In the letter to Heliodorus he speaks as if no Christian were allowed to retain his possessions,[180] and in the books against Jovinian he says many things about marriage which might be considered too harsh by a reader who is not well disposed. He writes: 'If it is good not to touch a woman, then it must be bad to touch her, for bad is the only opposite of good. But if it is bad and it is forgiven, then it is permitted so as to prevent something worse being done. But how can something be good if it is only permitted to prevent something worse?'[181] Jerome's idea is a pious one but it is seen as blasphemy by those who use his words to fabricate malicious charges against him.

It might be thought that Augustine, the most intellectually able and careful of all the Fathers, avoided all errors. And yet even he often insists on the belief that baptism is of no use to infants unless the flesh and blood of the Lord is given as well;[182] he based this belief on the words in the sixth chapter of St John's Gospel: 'Verily, verily I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will have no life in you.'[183]

If Augustine understood this passage of the gospels correctly, then the custom preserved by the church today is heretical, while that which is rejected as heretical is correct: this belief does however seem to have been held by the whole church, especially in the West, as much as by Augustine. But does not Augustine insist in many passages that men have no merits,[184] and does he not often attribute the universal salvation of man to grace?[185] (The book on faith addressed to Peter,[186] in which it is said that infants who die unbaptized must burn in everlasting fires, is in my opinion spurious.)

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179 Jerome Ep 52 CSEL 54 430–1

180 Jerome Ep 60 CSEL 54 562–3; see also J.H.D. Scourfield *Consoling Heliodorus: A Commentary on Jerome Letter 60* (Oxford 1993) 165–6.

181 Jerome *Adversus Jovinianum* 1.7 PL 23 (1845) 218

182 Augustine *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1.20.27 PL 44 124; *In Joannis Evangelium tractatus* 26 (on 6:15) PL 35 1613–15; Ep 186 CSEL 57 68; Ep 217 CSEL 57 415

183 John 6:54

184 Eg Augustine *De spiritu et littera* 9.15–10.16 PL 44 208–10

185 Erasmus did not approve of Augustine's more extreme position on the role of grace, a position into which he moved in response to Pelagius' views on the power of free will (see eg Ep 1804:75–91 of March 1527), but he is also capable of using Augustine against those Catholic apologists who overemphasize merits as opposed to grace, as in *Hyperaspistes II* CWE 77 535.

186 Pseudo-Augustine *De fide ad Petrum* 27 PL 40 774

In addition one could mention Augustine's assertion that the apostle Peter wavered in his faith after he had received the Holy Spirit, imputing to him perverse intentions and an excessive desire to impose on the gentiles the yoke of the Mosaic law.[187]

One of the points which is criticized in the writings of Chrysostom is his belief that it is unnecessary to confess one's sins to a priest if one confesses them to God; he does in fact intimate this in a number of passages but he states it explicitly in the homily on the incomprehensible nature of God.[188] It is however useless to try, as some people do, to excuse Chrysostom by arguing that he meant that the person who confesses to God through a priest can be said to be making his confession to God rather than to a man. His suggestion could find some kind of acceptance were it not for the fact that the reason for it is said to be to prevent the priest disclosing the sin or using it as a reproach, for this risk is unavoidable for anyone who makes his confession to a priest.

Chrysostom can also be criticized for what he says about the passage in the gospels which begins: 'There was a wedding . . .' In his homily against the Jews, pagans, and heretics he writes: 'If you have faith, you have everything.'[189] Might not some carping critic easily distort the true meaning and accuse Chrysostom of holding unorthodox beliefs on the grounds that he thought that the person who has faith also possesses love and has no need of good works?

In his commentary on the Epistle to Philemon he writes: 'For the church recognizes no distinction between servant and master.'[190] Chrysostom made this remark without realizing that he was doing anything wrong, and yet it could be said to be a shameful error by those people who now condemn remarks which they have taken out of context and mutilated. For nowadays the church dissolves marriages which have mistakenly been contracted with a servant or against the master's wishes. And might not some prejudiced person consider schismatic the belief which Chrysostom holds in common with many others – notably St Jerome – that bishops ought not to possess anything apart from food and clothing?

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187 See especially Augustine Ep 82 to Jerome in Carolinne White *The Correspondence (394–419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo* (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter 1990) 144–79.

188 Chrysostom *De incomparabili Dei natura* 5 PG 48 746

189 Chrysostom *Contra Iudaeos et Gentiles et haereticos* (on John 2:2) PG 48 1077

190 Chrysostom *Homilia in epistolam ad Philemonem* 1.1 PG 62 705

In expounding the parable about the wheat and the tares Chrysostom states without further explanation that heretics ought not to be put to death.[191] In the fourth homily on Matthew he states that when Mary said, 'how can this be?' she was experiencing something human, implying that she felt a little doubtful about the angel's words.[192] Again, in the fifth homily he says that Joseph had a better knowledge of the Scriptures than the Virgin, whom he refers to as 'untrained in the religious life' and 'altogether ignorant of the prophets.'[193] What sort of reaction will this statement produce in those who now consider it blasphemous to doubt that the Virgin had a perfect and immediate understanding of the fact that her baby was both God and man?

Hilary, in his work on the Trinity, states certain things which, if anyone were to propound them nowadays, would gravely offend the ears of our contemporary theologians. In his discussion of divine matters he uses many words in unusual contexts: for example, he often refers to the Father as 'originator.'[194] In book 12 he declares that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent through the Son.[195] And as he professes that the Son is true God of true God, he dare not claim the Holy Spirit to be anything other than the spirit of God the Father, a spirit that is holy and to be deserved – although in certain manuscripts some reader, offended by this description, has replaced the word *promerendum* 'to be deserved' by *adorandum* 'to be adored.'[196] But since Hilary teaches that the spirit is a gift, it is fitting for him to say that it must be won by deserving.

In book 4 of his work on the Trinity,[197] as well as elsewhere, he states that the Father alone is God who cannot be born – or as Augustine puts it, 'unbegotten,' while the Greek word is 'unborn' [ἀγένητον]. At this point some unfair critic may infer either that the Holy Spirit is not God or that he is begotten. In book 9 Hilary relates that the Father is greater than the Son,[198] by the very fact of being the Father, but the fact that the Son is a son does not thereby make him less than the Father; but if the Father is rightly said to be greater because he begets, then the Son ought therefore to be inferior because he does not beget.

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191 Matt 13:24–30; Chrysostom *Homilia 46 in Matthaeum* PG 58 477
192 Chrysostom *Homilia 4 in Matthaeum* PG 57 45
193 Chryosotom *Homilia 5 in Matthaeum* PG 57 56
194 The term used is *auctor*; Hilary *De Trinitate* 2.1 PL 10 50–1; 7.37 pl 10 230.
195 Ibidem 12.55 PL 10 469
196 Ibidem 12.57 PL 10 472
197 Ibidem 4.41 PL 10 126; Augustine Ep 238 CSEL 57 534
198 Hilary *De Trinitate* 9.56 PL 10 327

St Gregory believes that every act of sexual intercourse between a husband and wife is shameful and he therefore forbids any man to enter a church who has had sexual relations with his wife during the previous night. It is not a valid excuse to say that he means only when a husband has sexual relations with his wife for pleasure rather than for the purpose of procreation or to satisfy mutual obligation; for if he uses the phrase 'in no way' he refuses to admit any exception, and this is what Gregory says: 'For pleasure itself can in no way be blameless.'[199] He also wrote that nothing made by the hand of man should in any way be an object of worship,[200] and that the angels are rational creatures.[201]

There is no need to enumerate at this point those other later writers such as Bernard, Jean Gerson, Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, seeing that not only these examples which I have just listed but also many other errors are to be found in the writings of even the most outstanding pillars of the church. Are not many of the things stated in the papal decrees and decretals now regarded as heretical? And now we come to the pope himself, whom some people believe to be infallible, at least as regards matters of faith and morals. What then does it mean when, as often happens, a pope annuls the decrees of his late predecessor? Did not John XXII disagree with Nicholas III on the question of the poverty of Christ and the apostles?[202] I shall not mention all the numerous errors of which the Occamists accused John XXII, but in fact the University of Paris condemned his opinion that the souls of the good will not enjoy the beatific vision until after the resurrection of the dead[203] and other related beliefs which he held. Did not Innocent III[204] come into conflict with Celestine III who had passed a law regarding second marriages in cases where one partner had lapsed into heretical beliefs? Did not Gregory I repeal Pelagius' decree concerning the removal of wives from the deacons in Sicily, although they had married them legally before the publication of the edict, for Gregory believed that the decree was

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199 Gregory the Great Ep 11.64 PL 77 1196
200 Cf Gregory *Expositio in 1 Regum* 5.24 PL 79 432
201 Gregory *Expositio super Cantica Canticorum* 1.25 PL 79 488
202 H.J.D. Denzinger *Enchiridion symbolorum* (Freiburg im Breisgau 1991) 930–1, 'Error spiritualium de paupertate Christi' (Constitutio 'Cum inter nonnullos' of 12 Nov 1323); on the views of John XXII see David Knowles *The Religious Orders in England* 3 vols (Cambridge 1948–59) II 245–52. The issue of the poverty of Christ is related to the ideal of absolute poverty which was the aspiration of the original Franciscans.
203 Denzinger 1000 (Constitutio 'Benedictus Deus' of 29 Jan 1336)
204 Innocent III, letter to the bishop of Ferrara (1 May 1199) PL 214 588

at variance with the gospels and consequently heretical? And then Innocent III authorized what Gregory had condemned. In addition, did not Innocent annul the decree made by the Roman pontiffs which said that the man who had made a contract with two women should take as his wife the one with whom he has had carnal relations, while Innocent declared that such a man should take the woman with whom he had made the first contract?[205]

Now if someone were to examine the records of earlier church councils, would he not discover many things which are nowadays unjustly criticized on many counts? An example of this is to be found in the creed of the Council of Constantinople which is recited today at mass; there it says that the Holy Spirit proceeds only from the Father, and although the Son is said to be true God of true God, the Holy Spirit is only called Lord.[206] How many decrees have been passed on the subject of simony, some of which are now in practice obsolete while others have been condemned on the grounds that they contained incorrect definitions? Of the former kind are the numerous decrees concerning freedom of election, the number of priesthoods, and tax exemption for the church; of the latter kind, the fact that ordination by a simonist is invalid, and what he receives is equivalent to stolen property and what he gives is as dangerous as leprosy.

But why should I embark upon this vast ocean? The reverence and civility of the theologians should be praised – those who either ignore such

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205 In the long debate in the Schools on the nature of marriage Bologna had identified consummation as the essential element, while Peter Lombard and Paris asserted that the essential element was consent. Alexander III (1159–81), the predecessor of Innocent III (1198–1216), affirmed that marriage was intrinsically indissoluble by virtue of consent: 'the first marriage entered into by a woman prevails, the second is null even if the former is confirmed (*ratum*) and the second consummated.' The pope then added, 'albeit it was judged otherwise heretofore by some of our predecessors.' See P. Gasparri *Tractatus Canonicus de Matrimonio* 3rd ed (Paris 1904) I 500 n715, citing Alexander III; see Gregory IX *Compilatio Decretalium* X, lib. iii, tit. 32 De conversione coniugatorum cap. 3; *Collectio Decretum* I, c.5, IV, 4.

206 What is now known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed, formulated at the First Council of Constantinople (381), elaborated on the belief in the Holy Spirit contained in the creed issued at the First Council of Nicaea (325). The Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed speaks of the Holy Spirit as proceeding from the Father only. In the West the idea that the Spirit proceeded also from the Son (*Filioque*) was first added to the creed at the Third Council of Toledo (589). This revision of the creed began to spread in Charlemagne's empire in the early ninth century. The addition of the *Filioque* clause contributed to the schism between the eastern and western churches in 1054.

errors (as they themselves often make them) or interpret them in a suitable manner whenever they come across them. And this is granted both for antiquity and for a life of holiness and virtue. I grant that and approve it. Nevertheless, what I have suggested is true, namely that not even the most distinguished men have been able to avoid committing occasional errors and no amount of circumspection has enabled them to escape the backbiting of their critics.[207] Nor were they more fortunate during their lifetime than they were in their later reputation. Chrysostom was called an Origenist and was eventually hurled down from the summit of high office and died in exile. That was the doing of Theophilus and Epiphanius, one of whom was distinguished by his reputation for great learning, the other for holiness, and yet Satan, disguised as an angel of light,[208] can deceive such men too. Was Jerome upset only by Rufinus when he complains about those who snarl at him? Augustine was forced to publish a defence of certain parts of his work.[209] But if we now attempt to make the works of the Doctors of the church conform to contemporary standards, it is impossible to put forward even one of them whose work cannot be censured on a large number of points. In fact, you will hardly find anything expressed with such caution that it does not fall into some trap set by the critics, either because it has been asserted without due consideration or because it has been discussed in an ignorant and unskilful manner; sometimes because it is connected with a doctrine which has been condemned, or because the proposition is presumptuous or has been made without due reverence or contains some hint of unorthodoxy and is therefore suspect, or because it might prove something of a stumbling block to the weak or has been formulated in misleading words. But why should I try to enumerate the innumerable? Who can walk amidst so many traps without getting caught somewhere, even if he had more eyes than Argus is said to have had in the tales told by the ancient poets?[210] An additional factor is the monstrous ingratitude of mankind: no

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207 Cf *In psalmum 33* CWE 64 368; the question of patristic fallibility was a favourite theme of Erasmus, discussed for example in Ep 456 to Henry Bulloch and in the *Annotationes in Matt* 24 26 ASD VI-5 324:342–326:419.

208 Cf 2 Cor 11:14.

209 Jerome's former friend Rufinus became his implacable enemy during the so-called Origenist controversy at the end of the fourth century and was the object of much abuse from Jerome who resented Rufinus' criticisms. See particularly Jerome *Apologia adversus Rufinum* 2.27 PL 23 (1845) 451C and Ep 50 CSEL 54 388. Augustine defended his own works in the *Retractationes*, written in 427.

210 Eg Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 568

one shows any appreciation of all the correct things which have been written, but the one or two errors which are made are savagely attacked although such mistakes are only human.[211] A few minor faults serve to obliterate the memory of such great industry and dedication and the poor man is rewarded with furious abuse for his dedication and hard work, stabbed by tongues dipped in poison, stoned by the most impudent pamphlets, and beaten by the voices of people disputing and reviling on every side, so that he thinks he has neither ears nor eyes.

In fact tragedies, too, start with a prologue spoken by someone motivated by some personal hatred or grudge or by a desire for fame and glory or by some character defect. For there are certain temperaments which you might say were born for the very purpose of causing trouble to others who are struggling to produce some brilliant work and to hinder those who are assiduously engaged on some pious undertaking while they themselves produce nothing. Then the infection is passed on imperceptibly and becomes a plague and the fire gradually spreads until everyone is filled with a spirit of madness and cries of 'crucify, crucify' are heard on all sides. A noble mind considers nothing more desirable than a good reputation – so much so that many dread disgrace more than death itself – but those who intend to destroy a person completely first of all attack his reputation which is all that lives on after a man's death, for they do not consider it enough to have robbed him of his life and opportunities. It was in this way that the Scribes and Pharisees tried to attack Christ our King. Their aim was first and foremost to persuade the people that Jesus was a man of humble origin, an uneducated revolutionary, a blasphemer, an enemy of the Mosaic law, a magician, and even a man possessed by the devil. Condemned to a degrading execution, he hung between two thieves who were notorious criminals and deservedly accursed. When it was discovered that he had come back to life, some men were bribed to spread the rumour among the people that his lifeless body had been carried off during the night by his disciples and that the soldiers had divided his clothes among themselves. Who would have expected anyone to dare to assert that he was a relative or disciple of such a man? And yet for all this Christ alone could honestly say: 'I shall guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue.'

Even nowadays there are people who behave insanely in their murderous hatred, not only exposing human errors in the most cruel fashion but

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211 On the ingratitude of human judgment, cf Thomas More's prefatory letter to his *Utopia*, addressed to Peter Giles, *Complete Works of St Thomas More* (New Haven 1965) IV 42–4).

also exaggerating the most trivial mistakes in an extraordinary way, making mountains out of molehills.[212] They are not content to distort shamefully, for slanderous purposes, what was said correctly and in a spirit of devotion. No doubt blinded by their hatred, they cannot even refrain from saying things which are manifestly untrue, and do not consider that the listener or reader will immediately detest such obvious lies on the part of the slanderer. They try to disguise such a dreadful crime beneath a cloak of respectability, calling it Christian zeal. They seek out some Pilate figure to be an accomplice to their mad rage. 'We must not kill anyone,' they say, as if only the man who kills with a sword is a murderer and as if the person who uses poison to kill does not commit a more wicked murder than he who uses a sword. It is considerably more wicked to have the poison on your tongue than it is to carry it in a tiny phial. 'Adder's poison is on their lips,' the psalmist says; 'Their feet hurry to shed blood.'[213] You know that life and death are in the power of the tongue:[214] well, the feet are our subjective feelings. If you desire to kill your neighbour, what does it matter which weapon you use? Again in Psalm 139 it is written: 'They have sharpened their tongues like serpents; adder's poison is on their lips,'[215] and in Psalm 56: 'The sons of men whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword.'[216] And in Psalm 58 we read: 'Behold, they speak with their mouths and a sword is on their lips';[217] it is surely not surprising that they kill by speaking when they bear a sword on their lips. Similarly in Psalm 63 it is written: 'They have sharpened their tongues like a sword.'[218] And so we see that the tongue of a slanderer is a sharp weapon, dipped in poison.

In ancient literature it is recorded that when a Spartan called Thearidas who was sharpening his sword on a whetstone was asked whether it was sharp, he answered: 'Yes, sharper than slander.'[219] Finally in the book of the blessed Job the tongue is put in third place in a list of misfortunes which destroy men. 'You will be hidden from the scourge of the tongue,'[220] it says. And so it is disgraceful of people to say 'I am a clerk,' or 'I am a priest,'

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212 Cf Matt 23:24; Erasmus *Adagia* III i 27: *Culicem elephanti conferre.*
213 Ps 13:3 in the Vulgate text; Ps 139:4/140:3. Cf Prov 1:16; Isa 59:7; Rom 3:15.
214 Cf Prov 18:21.
215 Ps 139:4/140:3
216 Ps 56:5/57:4
217 Ps 58:8/59:7
218 Ps 63:4/64:3
219 Cf Plutarch *Moralia* 221C; *Apophthegmata* LB IV 117B; *Lingua* CWE 29 341.
220 Job 5:21

or 'I am a monk. I am not allowed to kill anyone and it is illegal to carry a weapon,' when they carry in their mouths by far the most destructive weapons – the poison of adders, arrows smeared with the juice of aconite, a sword of deadly sharpness, Tisiphone's terrible whip,[221] even a siege fortification. For in Psalm 108 when it says: 'The mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceiver are open against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue and surrounded me with expressions of hatred and attacked me without cause,'[222] you are being told of a most vicious attack: the open mouth is a ditch, the tongue a rampart, and the words are spears. In Jeremiah, too, we read: 'Come, let us strike him with the tongue and let us not pay attention to all he says.'[223] And so the tongue of the slanderer is also a stone which strikes the innocent man who tries not to listen. Or do you believe that Pilate put the Lord to death? No, he acquitted him, declaring that the man on whom he was forced to pass judgment was innocent. It was the priests, the Pharisees and Scribes, who put him to death for they trumped up charges against an innocent man, suborned false witnesses, and by means of their disgraceful shouts and threats forced the governor to hand Jesus over to their fury. It was these men, I say, these who really put an innocent man to death. How? Not with the sword, but with their tongues when they humiliated him in front of the crowds, when they informed against him and when they cried, 'crucify him.' And yet, devoted to purity as they are, they naturally fear to enter the governor's residence in case they become defiled and they purify themselves for the eating of the paschal lamb. Theirs is an ungodly religion, but it is more ungodly for a Christian to resemble a Pharisee, or rather to be worse than a Pharisee, and to approach the Lord's table as if he were quite pure and touch the sacraments at which even the angels tremble, although he would not dare to approach if he happened to have tasted of the lupin.[224]

'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer,'[225] says St John, and 'A lying mouth destroys the soul,'[226] as it is written in the book of Wisdom.

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221 Tisiphone was, according to Greek mythology, one of the Furies and was particularly responsible for punishing murderers: see Virgil *Aeneid* 6.570–1 for the image of her with a whip.
222 Ps 108/109:2–3
223 Jer 18:18
224 The lupin seed was used, among other things, to cure a hangover.
225 1 John 3:15
226 Wisd 1:11

Anyone who destroys his fellow man by means of trumped-up charges is a slanderer, and even if his victim does not die, he is nonetheless a murderer. To clarify this statement, let us imagine someone who, because of his humble status, is not surrounded by friends, so one might think that no one would come forward to avenge his death; in addition he shuns any kind of disturbance, so that even if he could avenge himself, he would not wish to; add to this the fact that he is weak with age and ill-health, and his mental faculties are enfeebled. Those who conspire against such a person may say: 'Let us all shout together. Someone must humiliate him in front of a crowd of ignorant and credulous people, whether at public meetings, in discussions, at parties, or while travelling by land or sea. Someone else should use abusive and slanderous pamphlets to revile him, while another can gradually poison the minds of the authorities, and we can all privately pervert the opinions of anyone we meet by expressing our views in secret: if we persist in this, that feeble fellow will gradually waste away in mental anguish even if no one attacks him physically. Not only shall we not be murderers – we shall actually be congratulated on our virtue, perhaps not so much by just and honest people but at least by the majority.' Do people who think like this, I ask you, seem to be innocent of murder, even if their victim does not die despite all their machinations? They may say: 'What we are doing we do as a favour. We are concerned for the peace of the church.' Does not injustice always delude itself and do not hatred and envy interpret everything they accomplish in a favourable light? Does not anger regard whatever it does as completely justified? According to the words of Theocritus, the lover sees everything – even ugly things – through rose-tinted spectacles,[227] and in the same way the person whose heart is full of hatred and malice regards even beautiful things as ugly. It is the same with people whose eyes are affected by the sun: to them everything looks green, not because the original colour of things has changed but because of the bile in their eyes. If it is the case that the perceptions of a bodily organ, when impaired, are inaccurate, it is much more true that the mind, when corrupted by passion, makes errors of judgment. Accordingly no one whose mind is corrupted by hatred and malice should trust himself or assume the task of judging, and yet religious duty is a very ready pretext for concealing the worst crimes. And so those who believe that they are innocent of murder because they do not attack with the sword

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227 Theocritus 6.18–19; cf *Adagia* I ii 15: *Suum cuique pulchrum*.

or bow, although their teeth are weapons and arrows and their tongue is a sharp sword,[228] should not congratulate themselves on their wicked intentions.

It might be relevant at this point to relate, not a fictitious story, but one which the Germans say is true. In a certain country village a severe pestilence was raging. Someone bore a bitter grudge against the village priest and planned an unusual kind of revenge. One day when he happened to be passing through the village, he found the peasants lamenting the fact that so many people there were dying of the plague. When they said that they could not imagine what the cause of the disaster was, this man said: 'If you agree to keep a secret, I shall reveal to you the source of this terrible misfortune.' When they promised to say nothing he told them: 'Your priest has brought this plague on you. I am not asking you to believe my words but you can verify what I say by means of an experiment. When the priest consecrates the lustral water, pay careful attention to his words: if you do not hear him mention the plague among the other curses, then I am lying.' Having thrown out this dangerous hint he went on his way. They did as he had advised and did indeed hear those very words. The foolish and savage peasants, thinking that the matter had been satisfactorily proved, seized the priest and threw him, protesting in vain, into a grave which happened to be lying open at the time, and buried him alive. Are we to acquit this man of a charge of murder? He did not use poison – except of the tongue; he did not use a spear or a sword – except of the mouth, and that is the most wicked kind of murder. Ulysses' use of slander to cause the death of Palamedes was more disgraceful than if he had killed him with a sword.[229] It is not always the man who draws the sword but rather the person who is responsible for the death who is the murderer. John the Baptist was beheaded; do you wish to know who really killed him?[230] Just consider where they took

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228 Cf Ps 56:5/57:4. Erasmus' words here reflect his own situation: around the time of the composition of this psalm commentary Erasmus was being attacked for his views on a number of fronts, eg by the Dominican Sichem (Eustachius van der Rivieren), by Johann Eck, and by the Augustinian canon Steuco. See Erika Rummel *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics* 2 vols (Nieuwkoop 1989) I 47–8, 131–2; II 27, 135–9.

229 Ulysses and Palamedes were enemies within the Greek army after Palamedes detected Ulysses's pretence of being mad to avoid going to Troy. In revenge Ulysses forged a letter and hid gold in Palamedes' tent to make it seem that he was planning to betray the Greeks to Priam: Palamedes was found guilty and put to death.

230 Cf Matt 14:3–12.

his head after he had been decapitated: the king, overcome by love, allowed the execution; the daughter, on her mother's orders, demanded it; the executioner chopped the head off; a ghastly dish was brought in to the banquet and presented to the daughter but she carried it to her mother whose tongue had put this most holy man to death. God is well aware who is really responsible, even if people are suborned and the criminal deed itself is transferred to the tenth degree.

I do not wish anyone to jump to the conclusion that I want to defend people who are obviously heretics and have been justly condemned as such, and who disturb the peace of the church with their intransigent and wicked behaviour; nor that I am criticizing bishops and theologians who perform their duties in fear of God and with Christian kindness, mindful of their own failings. No, my warning is directed at those who give way to their personal emotions under the pretext of religious duty and kill their brother with their tongue, committing a murder more sinful than if they were killing him with a sword. For it is a mark of Christian kindness not to make rash judgments and to forgive human error in others, while not forgetting one's own weaknesses; to put a favourable interpretation on anything which has been ambiguously expressed and to express sincere approval of things which have been well said; and in cases where the seriousness of the sin makes it wrong to tolerate it, the Christian should use frank advice, given in private, to put the sinner back on the right path if he has sinned inadvertently or because of some false conviction; but if he is guilty of evil intent as well, then the Christian must try by every means to cure his neighbour but should resort to extreme measures only with great sorrow of mind. In general, however, no shouts are more offensive than those of people who do not understand what they are criticizing, and even if their understanding is perfectly sound, their passions mislead them so much that they are unable to make an accurate judgment. The person who exaggerates his neighbour's faults in a hostile manner and is more concerned to harm than to heal is acting more disgracefully than the one who makes some mistake of interpretation out of ignorance or thoughtlessness, as was the case with the leading Doctors of the church. But no one sins out of hatred or envy unless he has been inspired by the spirit of Satan. How should we judge the person who is very harsh in his condemnation of something which was said in all reverence, and criticizes what he does not understand?[231] Has it not been established and proved in a number of

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231 Cf 2 Pet 2:12.

ways that certain people, wishing to appear knowledgeable about the heavens,[232] have accused others of heresy and blasphemy, although their lack of linguistic comprehension means that they do not understand what they are criticizing? Has it not often been shown that such people have, with furious tirades, condemned as blasphemous opinions which can be found not only in the writings of orthodox men but even in the canonical books of Scripture? They show no shame when exposed, nor do they mend their ways when admonished; instead they become even more savage and commit more dreadful slander and – if you can credit it – they expect their wickedness to win them praise. They consider themselves almost divine and call stubborn anyone who asks for proof or who does not immediately own himself beaten when confronted by some accusation, however scandalous and false it may be. They express their outrage by shouting, 'it's a disgrace, it's a disgrace,' as if it were not far more disgraceful to attack your neighbour's life and reputation with accusations that are obviously untrue. And so it happens that men are mocked even when their teachings are true and reverent.

This psalm, then, presents us with a devout and right-thinking man who, in accordance with God's will, has been persecuted by ungrateful and wicked people to such an extent that life has become hateful to him. He does not, however, wish to render like for like,[233] lest he should turn out to be just like those of whom he disapproves. Instead he takes refuge in silence, which offers him the most secure protection, especially as he is still seething with indignation and cannot yet bear a healing hand to touch him; in accordance with the feelings of the unregenerate man,[234] he still demands revenge. For he mentions a number of ways in which a man might be roused to vengeance; when he realizes that none of these is beneficial to his salvation, he at last recovers his self-possession for a while and says to himself, 'I have said, I shall guard my ways.'

According to the proverb,[235] a fisherman learns to be careful after he has been bitten, while this man learns by his mistake. He becomes self-critical in every respect; he keeps a watch on all his actions in case he inadvertently does something which might in future give his critics an

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232 Erasmus here uses a Greek phrase taken from Lucian's dialogue *Icaromenippus* 5, referring disparagingly to those who have pretensions to exhaustive understanding of cosmological or theological questions.

233 *Adagia* I i 35: *Par pari referre*

234 Cf Eph 4:22–4; Col 3:9.

235 *Adagia* I i 29: *Piscator ictus sapiet*

opportunity for slander. What is he afraid of? Why is he on his guard? 'That I may not sin with my tongue,' he says. Having experienced the incredible malice of those who attack him with every kind of false accusation, he takes great care to regulate all his actions, not only so that they will be unable to find legitimate fault with anything he does, but also (and this is the most difficult thing) to prevent his tongue from blurting out some word which might justifiably be open to slander. In fact 'to guard' is used here not of a person preserving but of someone observing, for he who is cautious and fears danger can be said to observe. Furthermore, nothing is more difficult than to curb the tongue – the fastest moving part of the body – so as to prevent it making some slip out of thoughtlessness or anger; consequently we often experience the truth of Plato's words, 'the most trivial offence has the most serious penalty.'[236] 'He who watches his mouth and tongue,' says the writer of Proverbs, 'keeps his soul out of difficulty,'[237] since 'death and life are in the power of the tongue,'[238] as the same writer states in another passage. Each person tends to be indulgent towards his own thoughts and looks favourably on his own discoveries, as parents do with their children. But the just man in this psalm, familiar as he is with human malice, is critical of all his own thoughts and ponders them for a long time before allowing them to burst out on his tongue or making them public in writing. As long as the wicked thought remains hidden in the remote recesses of the heart, it cannot corrupt other people and is easily corrected; but once the thought has been expressed in words it cannot be recalled,[239] and it is much more difficult to retract something which has been written down and passes quickly from one man's hands to another's. So St James was right to advise 'that every man should be quick to listen but slow to speak';[240] and Horace says that a written work should be withheld for nine years before publication.[241]

Some people deduce from this that the man who is represented in this psalm was perfect or very nearly so, seeing that he exercises such a degree of control over all the parts of his body that they obey the spirit without rebelling – all except the tongue, which he is now trying to restrain. But if this were true he would not cry out, 'deliver me from all my transgressions,'

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236 Plato *Laws* 717D; cf *Adagia* III i 18: *Levissima res oratio.*
237 Prov 21:23
238 Prov 18:21
239 Cf Horace *Epistles* 1.18.71.
240 James 1:19
241 Horace *Ars poetica* 388

as he does further on. Why then does he mention only the tongue? Because it is with this part of the body in particular that men sin when afflicted with great disasters. For not only do they rage against the mortals responsible for their misfortunes; sometimes they are not even ashamed to murmur against God, and while they are being punished for their crimes they commit an offence which makes them deserve to be punished even more severely. This was not how blessed Job behaved: he speaks with moderation when he says: 'Even if I were at all just, I would not answer but would appeal to my judge,'[242] and at the end of the book he rebukes himself, using dust and ashes to express his repentance.[243]

It was a mark of perfection on his part that he restrained his tongue from blurting out anything by mistake, but because it is rare for human nature to achieve such perfection, the next best thing is to remain silent, according to the saying of the wise man: 'My son, you have sinned. Do not add another offence.'[244] The philosopher Athenodorus is said to have given Octavian Augustus a stern warning not to say or do anything in anger until he had first recited the Greek alphabet.[245] The philosopher was alluding to the superstitious belief held by some people who think that the violent passions of the soul can be stilled by reciting certain words; but he was really saying that the most effective cures for anger are delay and silence. We read that the pagans restrained themselves from punishing their slaves who deserved to be executed for no other reason than that it was anger which motivated them to punish.[246] Is it not much more fitting that if ever a Christian feels he has been provoked, he should recite to himself – before he says or does anything – not the Greek alphabet but some verses from Scripture, as, for example, 'do not allow anger to take hold of you and make you attack someone' or 'the proud and arrogant man is called a fool if he expresses his pride in anger' or 'the fool reveals his anger without delay but sensible is the man who ignores the insult.'[247] Or one might repeat to oneself this line from the Psalms: 'be angry and do not sin';[248] or use this line from Ecclesiastes: 'remove the anger from your heart and the spitefulness from

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242 Job 9:15
243 Cf Job 42:6.
244 Ecclus 21:1
245 Cf Plutarch *Moralia* 207C; *Lingua* CWE 29 389.
246 Cf *Apophthegmata* LB IV 206B.
247 Job 36:18; Prov 21:24, 12:16
248 Ps 4:5/4:4: anger here is directed against one's own sins, as *In psalmum 4* CWE 64 187.

your flesh';[249] or this one: 'do not be swift to anger, since anger sits in the breast of the fool.'[250] More suitable, however, than any other is this saying from the gospels: 'Whoever is angry with his brother will be in danger of judgment.'[251] Then there are the words of Paul: 'Do not avenge yourselves, dearly beloved, but yield to his anger.'[252] Similarly James says: 'Be slow to anger for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God.'[253]

If one recites magic formulas of this kind when in a rage it will be easy to restrain one's tongue and prevent it blurting out insolent words; and he who does this will become like Idythun, leaping from the flesh to the spirit and he will say to himself: 'I shall guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue.' Consider then how all things work together for the good of those who love God,[254] seeing that even the spite of wicked men benefits them greatly. One sees many people who, when provoked by false accusations, are roused to self-defence, regardless of what might slip out at any moment; and not only do they not correct anything which does slip out inadvertently, but to the bad things they actually add worse. But the wickedness of slanderers makes a good man more cautious in everything that he says and does. Nature has tied a man's tongue down with various restraints and has in addition surrounded it with the double palisade of the teeth and enclosed it within the doors of the lips. What does the wise man do? Not content with these restraints he makes a firm decision and puts a lock on his mouth with the words, 'I shall guard,' or (according to the more meaningful description given in the original Hebrew text), he puts a clasp, or bolt, or bridle, or bar on his tongue. (For it is by such means that untamed animals are usually restrained because they are likely to do damage if let loose.) But as St James said: 'No man can tame the tongue,'[255] while no animal is by nature so wild that it cannot be tamed by human skill and effort. Similarly, of all the innumerable kinds of living things there is none more capable of inflicting damage than an evil tongue.[256]

To put a bolt on one's mouth is a more drastic measure than to keep a watch on one's ways. To keep a watch is a sign of vigilance but here the

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249 Eccles 11:10
250 Eccles 7:9
251 Matt 5:22
252 Rom 12:19
253 James 1:19–20
254 Cf Rom 8:28.
255 James 3:8
256 The theme of slander had been treated at length in Erasmus' work *Lingua* of 1525 CWE 29 262–412; cf *De puritate tabernaculi* below 249–52.

violence of the bridle is being imposed on a violent part of the body so that, however savage the thoughts within may be, the bar placed to restrain them prevents them from breaking out. But what is this bar? What else but the fear of God? And so, when faced with an audience which is eager to learn, he is cautious and watchful of everything for fear of making some mistake. But whenever a sinner or (as the original Hebrew text puts it) a wicked man confronts a good one, he keeps his mouth absolutely shut and locked up. It does not say 'sinners' but 'sinner' and in Greek the definite article is added – ὁ ἁμαρτωλός – as if referring to some particular wicked person: this is undoubtedly that one who lays charges against his brothers and who derives his name from the Greek word for slander, that is the devil,[257] at whose instigation all who slander their neighbour are driven to act. It is he who is responsible for all slander; dishonest men are merely his tools. In fact he never ceases to create trouble for those who desire to live virtuously in Christ Jesus,[258] and the more sacred the business in which the good man is engaged, the more assiduously the devil tries to obstruct it. But there is no occupation more sacred than to introduce Christ into the minds of men by means of beneficial teaching, and such is the task of bishops and theologians and those who instruct the world by publishing books. It is possible to bear Satan's attacks if they are slight but it is far more difficult to endure when he confronts you face to face. He does so by completely surrounding a person – laying siege to him, as it were – and pursuing him closely, using every possible device to break the just man's endurance, urging several men to attack this one man and never ceasing his onslaught.

To an attack of such force there is no safer response than an obstinate silence. This is what we are told by that ancient proverb which talks of 'the sure reward for silence,'[259] and this thought is also elegantly expressed by Horace in his *Odes*: 'For faithful silence, too, there is a sure reward.'[260] That is why the wisest men, who directed all their endeavours to preserving themselves and their followers free from all vices, especially recommended silence. If the slanderer's accusation is true (for the person who makes a true accusation with the intention of hurting someone is also a slanderer), or if, as is usually the case, truth is mixed with lies, then the just man can turn

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257 The Latin word for the devil, *diabolus*, is derived from the Greek word for slander.

258 Cf 2 Tim 3:12.

259 *Adagia* III v 3: *Silentii tutum praemium*

260 Horace *Odes* 3.2.25–6

his opponent's insults to his own advantage by taking to heart this saying of Isaiah: 'If you turn and rest, you will be saved. In silence and hope will be your strength.'[261] People who are determined to destroy rather than to heal interpret a modest silence as a confession of guilt, but even so every care must be taken to avoid the same mistake being made twice and some error being committed which the enemy can criticize once more. If the slanderer, maddened by his hatred, makes a false accusation, not caring what he says as long as he can ruin his victim, one should not kick against the pricks nor pour oil on the flames,[262] but submit to his fury, as Paul warns in a gentle way: 'Dearly beloved, do not avenge yourselves but yield to his anger.'[263] Anger is a violent but short-lived passion,[264] but if it develops into hatred it becomes incurable.

If you are in the wrong, your conscience urges you to keep quiet; if you are in the right, you should keep quiet so as not to commit some blunder. A person does wrong if he exacerbates the fury of the wicked by what he says when there is no hope of healing. The wise man, however, recognized that there was a time for silence and a time for speaking.[265] The Lord maintained a complete silence before Herod, while in the presence of Caiaphas and also of Pilate he spoke but a few words. If you respond to the wicked with abuse you aggravate the problem rather than alleviating it, but if you attempt to convince them calmly, then you are throwing what is holy to the dogs and casting pearls before swine.[266] It would however be very difficult to prescribe precisely when it is right to speak and when to keep quiet, for not even the Lord himself remained silent in the face of every insult. There are times when it is definitely wrong to remain silent. When the Lord was accused of being a Samaritan, he met the reproach with silence, but he gave a forthright denial to the accusation that he was possessed by a devil. In addition he often responded sharply to the Pharisees when they put him to the test and he was not silent when someone attacked him with blows, although he did respond with great calmness. But when confronted by the witnesses who had been suborned, by the soldiers who spat in his

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261 Isa 30:15
262 *Adagia* I iii 46: *Contra stimulum calces*; I ii 9: *Oleum camino addere*
263 Rom 12:19
264 Cf Horace *Epistles* 1.2.62: 'Ira furor brevis est'; Seneca *De ira* 1.1; *Lingua* CWE 29 277.
265 Eccles 3:7; 'the wise man' was a common designation for the writer of the Old Testament Wisdom literature.
266 Cf Matt 7:6.

face, by those who beat him with their fists and those who put a crown of thorns on him – in short, by those people who tried to humiliate him in every way, he maintained an absolute silence because he had no hope of gaining anything by speaking. And then when he hung upon the cross he maintained a determined silence towards those who mocked him. In the same way St Paul, who wrote: 'we are reviled and we bless,'[267] was certainly not silent when confronted by Elymas the sorcerer,[268] and he even replied to Peter, opposing him to his face.[269] Nor did he keep quiet before the magistrate on whose orders he was beaten, and he also warned Timothy to rebuke and reprove in season and out of season.[270]

Solomon says: 'Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he think he is wise.'[271] How can someone both answer and not answer the same person? If only the Lord would at this point deign to tune the strings of my lyre so that I could transform this dissonance into a tuneful harmony! Perhaps some emphasis is placed on the pronouns. In the gospels the Lord assumes the character of a man when he says: 'Your will be done, not mine,' and 'My teaching is not mine.'[272] There is no doubt that the Lord took up the cross willingly, but it is human nature to fear death and insofar as the Lord was human, he only communicated the gospel teaching, he did not create it.[273] And so he is not simply denying that it is his teaching, but is assigning the chief glory to the Father so as to gain more authority for what he says among the Jews who acknowledged God but not the Son of God.

The ways of God are very different from the ways of men, as Isaiah affirms: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are more exalted than your ways and my thoughts more than your thoughts.'[274] And so at this point the prophet is still speaking as a man when he says: 'I have said, I shall guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue,' so that you may understand that it is man's tongue which needs to

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267 1 Cor 4:12
268 Acts 13:8–11
269 Gal 2:11
270 Acts 23:2–3; 2 Tim 4:2
271 Prov 26:4–5
272 Matt 26:42; Luke 22:42; John 7:16
273 Epp 108–9; in the *De taedio Iesu* CWE 70 13–67 Erasmus argued against Colet that Christ took up the cross willingly but did fear death for himself, his human nature dominating over his divine nature at the crucifixion; cf *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 52 and n227.
274 Isa 55:8–9

be curbed and only God's tongue which utters perfect thoughts. Similarly it is man's mouth which needs a muzzle on it, while the mouth of God speaks the truth and says things worthy of God. 'And all flesh,' says the prophet, 'will see because the mouth of the Lord has spoken' and elsewhere he reprimands the people because they have not questioned the mouth of the Lord.[275] It was with this mouth that in days gone by God spoke through the prophets who were filled with his Spirit, and with this mouth he speaks to us and will speak in the Holy Scriptures until the fulfilment of time. Consequently great caution is needed whenever a man speaks with his own mouth, in other words when he speaks in accordance with human feelings rather than according to the rule of Scripture.

Similarly when the sinner attacks a man without abusing God, he is taking his stand against the man rather than against God. This is the case when, for example, he taunts someone for his ignorance, pride, greed, poverty, physical deformity, humble background, or want of eloquence, because these are more or less common to all human beings and the taunts assail only one man: to react to them is a sign of vindictiveness rather than of reverence for God. If however God's glory or the welfare of the Christian people is the object of an attack, then it is not right to remain silent. 'I do not have a demon,' says the Lord, 'but I honour my Father,'[276] and 'If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, in whose name do your sons cast them out?'[277] When Satan exploited the Scriptures to try and trick the Lord, the Lord answered him and did not answer; he rebuffed him when Satan tempted him to blaspheme but did not speak the words which Satan expected. Similarly St Paul said: 'I am not mad, excellent Festus, but I am speaking the sober truth.'[278] He would have borne in silence the insult of being called mad had he not realized that it put the gospel at risk. When the Sadducees questioned the Lord about the seven brothers married to one wife, he answered them according to their folly, and when the Pharisees asked what authority he relied upon in doing what he did, he answered them according to their folly, saying: 'Where did the baptism of John come from, from heaven or from men?'[279]

So it appears that when someone makes a provocative statement in order to pick a quarrel rather than to get closer to the truth, he ought occasionally to be proved wrong so as to make him ashamed. But whenever the

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275 Isa 40:5, 30:1–2
276 John 8:49
277 Matt 12:27; Luke 11:19
278 Acts 26:25
279 Matt 21:25

situation shows no prospect of success but calls for an example of Christian tolerance, one should not answer the fool according to his folly in case an unpleasant quarrel should erupt with insults being hurled on both sides. But in cases where silence might harm the glory of God, one should respond with the mouth of God rather than with the human tongue. Holy Scripture is of use here, too, in checking the blasphemy of the wicked and refuting those who oppose the truth. But to those who err in all innocence and whose disagreement is due to ignorance of the truth rather than to evil intentions we should give an explanation of our hope with meekness and trembling.[280]

It is also possible to interpret what is said here to imply that he is shutting his mouth not when he is completely silent but when he controls his anger and prevents it bursting out in abusive language. For he also responds who hurls abuse in return for abuse. In cases where the hatred can be remedied gentle words may often assuage the anger. However, when the fury is implacable, the most sensible reaction is to remain silent, since some people's wickedness is so great that they are provoked even by the most gentle words and interpret as ironical things which are said in all innocence. If possible it is a good idea to withdraw as well, depriving one's opponent of all opportunity for malice. However, it is the mark of perfect gentleness to bestow kind words on the person who is cursing us,[281] not while his rage is at its most violent but later when we sense that the initial ardour has cooled a bit.

In my opinion, however, it is not an example of Christian perfection which is being presented here, but rather the example of a man – a Jew rather than a Christian – struggling with overwhelming temptations. When he says, 'I have kept silent,' it shows that he has attained some degree of perfection, but what follows is characteristic of someone who is still contending with human passions: 'And I was humbled and refrained from saying good things; my heart grew hot within me and a fire burned in my thoughts.' He has restrained his tongue – even philosophers often do the same – but his mind is still in a turmoil. The mouth is silent but the passions within are turbulent. 'I have kept silent' but in such a way that I was humbled and became dejected. He is therefore very close to being overcome and crushed. Now those who have made progress towards Christian perfection are very far from being upset by the abuse and persecution of the wicked; in accordance with Christ's teaching they rejoice and exult instead, conscious that

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280 Cf 1 Pet 3:15–16.
281 Cf Rom 12:14.

the greater the evils which afflict them in this life for the sake of Christ, the greater the reward which is laid up for them in heaven.[282] But a more human example has been set before us in this psalm so that we might learn from this description how to struggle through the storms of temptation. The person here portrayed is not yet utterly overwhelmed but merely humbled. Jerome's translation from the Hebrew has the phrase 'in silence' instead of 'I was humbled' which is the version given by the Septuagint: 'I became speechless in silence.' The Jews often use this figure of speech – that is, repetition of the same word – as for example when they say 'if you were to hear with your hearing' or 'seeing, you will see' or 'weeping, he will weep.'[283] The verb *obmutescere* 'to be speechless' has more force than *silere* 'to be quiet,' but 'to be speechless in silence' has more force than either verb. Someone who is quiet can speak when he wishes; someone who is speechless cannot do so even if he wishes to say something; but it is usually an exceptionally powerful emotion which deprives a man of the ability to speak – a fact also noted by the tragedian who wrote this line: 'Trivial cares speak out, great ones are speechless.'[284] And so violent was the grief of the blessed Job that he lost the faculty of speech for seven days.[285]

Some people understand the humbled person to be the one who has been humiliated and goaded by the stings of conscience to feel remorse. When wicked men are abused they swell with indignation, thinking of the good deeds they have done and, slinging on their backs the bag which contains their faults,[286] they feel resentful, as if they did not deserve to be criticized. But a good person considers what he himself has been guilty of in God's eyes rather than the slanderer's purpose in attacking him. For however false his enemy's accusations may be, he still deserves a whipping from God as a punishment for other misdeeds. And so he is speechless when he considers what he deserves and is humbled to repentance. He allows himself to be defeated by a man so that he might himself defeat God's anger, for nothing wins God over as quickly as a contrite and humble heart.[287] He is omnipotent and cannot be frightened into submission; you cannot win him over with gifts for he lacks nothing and all good things have their source in him; nor can you fight him for in his sight no living man is

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282 Matt 5:11–12
283 Cf Isa 6:9.
284 Seneca *Phaedra* 607
285 Job 2:13
286 *Adagia* I vi 90: *Non videmus manticae quod in tergo est*
287 Ps 50:19/51:17

justified.[288] And so what is left but to recognize God's justice in our sufferings and to confess our wickedness, abandon our rebelliousness, and be humbled beneath God's powerful hand, so that he might raise us up in the time of visitation?[289]

'And I have refrained from saying good things.' This was not what David did: he refrained from abuse but he did not refrain from saying good things when he called Abishai back as he was hurrying with his men to commit murder or when he excused Shimei's furious insolence, reasoning that the Lord had commanded him to vent his anger in this violent manner against David in his distress.[290] Of course, it is a natural human reaction to be hurt by men's ingratitude and to cease to do good when one earns nothing in return for acts of kindness except hatred, abuse, and suffering. (In the sacred writings the term 'silence' is occasionally applied to all forms of inaction: for example, the waves of the sea are said to have gone silent and the earth is silent when it is not disturbed by storms or wars; and the dutiful women are said by St Luke to have kept silent on the sabbath, because they left off their work.)[291] It is a sign of Christian perfection to bless those who malign you and to treat well those who treat you badly (in other words, to follow the example of your Father in heaven who makes his sun rise and the rain fall on good and bad alike),[292] to repay wicked deeds with kindness,[293] and so to heap fiery coals on your enemy's head[294] in the hope that he may at last be subdued, his spirit made gentle and repentant and his hatred transformed into benevolence. But the flesh protests: 'Why should I do good to these people? They do not deserve it. I shall not waste my kindness on them.' It is natural for a person who does good to someone to think like this, but if he is really virtuous he cannot be disappointed of his reward because it is to Christ that he is lending his services at interest.

Neither is it absurd to interpret this verse as some people do when they maintain that 'I have refrained from saying good things' means 'I did not boast of my good deeds, but turned my eyes upon my wicked deeds' (for this is how men are often humbled); 'I was humbled,' recognizing the wrongfulness of my behaviour and not boasting of my right-

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288 Cf Ps 142/143:2.
289 1 Pet 5:6
290 Cf 1 Kings/1 Sam 26:9; 2 Kings/Sam 16:9–10.
291 Cf Luke 23:56.
292 Matt 5:44–5
293 Cf Rom 12:17.
294 Cf Prov 25:22; Rom 12:20.

eousness. The righteous man makes no mention of his achievements but God does not keep quiet about them, as it says in Psalm 108: 'Be not silent of my praise, O God, for the mouth of the sinner and the mouth of the deceiver are open against me.'[295] 'Vengeance is mine, he says, and I shall repay you.'[296] Do not keep quiet about God's glory when you are in distress and he in turn will openly praise your achievements on your behalf. It is not the person who praises himself who is esteemed but he whom God praises.[297] And so the supreme Idythun did not seek his own glory, knowing that there was someone who would seek it and judge it; and just as the sheep makes no sound when it is led to the slaughter, so he would not open his mouth;[298] when he was assailed by abuse, he did not retaliate with insults, and although he suffered unjustly he threatened no revenge but gave himself up to the one who judges justly.[299] He made no reply to the false witnesses and said nothing harsh to the wicked soldier or to the Pharisees when they reviled him; but he never kept quiet about the Father's glory, and he in turn did not refrain from praising the Son, but transformed the ignominy inflicted by those wicked people into supreme glory and bestowed on him the name which is above all names so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and beneath the earth.[300] Christ suffered for us so that we might follow in his footsteps. If we follow his example and submit to God's power, we shall, like Christ, be glorified with him. The Jews laid charges against him, Pilate judged him, and the soldiers crucified him: in all these people Satan was at work, driving them to act as they did; but Christ looked to the Father who was the prime cause of it all and who gave his Son that we might be redeemed.

The martyrs, too, remained silent under torture and did not boast of their strength, but God did not keep quiet about their achievements: instead he caused both the angels of God and men to revere their memory as holy. Let us follow their example and make no mention of our own achievements when God allows us to suffer in various ways, but let us not keep silent about the goodness of him who mercifully cleanses his followers in this life so that he might receive them into his eternal glory.

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295 Ps 108/109:1
296 Rom 12:19
297 2 Cor 10:18
298 Isa 53:7–8; Acts 8:32
299 Cf 1 Pet 2:23.
300 Phil 2:9–10

This interpretation, I maintain, is in no way irreverent, but the one I gave earlier is, in my opinion, more suited to the course of the whole argument. Someone who is incensed by human malice and ceases to be kind to others has not yet achieved Christian perfection. He will, however, have attained some degree of virtue if he comes to his senses and does not dwell on the injury or if he only refrains from doing good rather than planning any revenge. We read that some men who were famous for their eloquence and others of proven holiness imposed silence on themselves for their whole lives because they had let slip something which was contrary to the purity of Catholic teaching. This is certainly better than dwelling on the mistake or heaping error upon error. It would, however, be a sign of greater virtue to compensate for the human error by saying the right things instead of taking one's revenge in perpetual silence. But it is in vain that the man in this psalm has sought a remedy in stubborn silence: so far from allaying his mental agony, as long as it remained suppressed it grew increasingly violent and painful.

'And my distress,' he says, 'grew worse,' or 'was disturbed.' As the poet says, a fire which is concealed burns more fiercely,[301] and a pain which is dormant is reawakened if you move. But one can obtain some relief in distress by giving voice to one's anxieties and passions; and anger sometimes abates if one retaliates. But throwing water on to burning pitch makes the fire blaze more strongly, and in the same way, if you try to resist the violent irritation you are feeling, your anguish only increases.

It can also be interpreted in the following way: 'My anguish has been renewed, for even my silence does not serve to appease the wicked man but he irritates the wound with new insults and mocks me as if I were already defeated.' Patience too often tried festers and turns to rage.[302] Such are the disturbances of the flesh which again and again rebels against the spirit.

And so the just man continues by saying: 'My heart grew hot within me and a fire burned in my thoughts.' Outwardly the tongue is cold in silence but what good is it if the fire remains in the heart? The tongue makes no threats but the heart plots revenge. For this is not the fire of love with which the Lord's disciples were inflamed when they said: 'Did not our hearts burn within us?'[303] Pain, too, has a fire of its own which is all the

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301 Cf Ovid *Metamorphoses* 4.64; Virgil *Georgics* 4.263.

302 Cf the maxim attributed to Publius, 'Oft wounded patience will to madness turn,' cited in *Adagia* I v 67: *Funem abrumpere nimium tenendo* 'To stretch the rope till it breaks.'

303 Luke 24:32

more devastating when we are injured by those whom we treated well and our kindness is repaid by insults. It was this kind of fire which Jeremiah seems to have felt in his heart when he said: 'I have become a laughing stock all day. Everyone mocks me and the word of the Lord has become a reproach and an object of scorn all day. And I said, I will not remember him and I will not speak any more in his name. And a raging fire was produced in my heart, so to speak, shut up in my bones, and I grew weak and unable to bear it. For I heard the insults of many people and the terror on every side. "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all those who were my friends and who protected me. "Perhaps he will be deceived and we will overcome him and take our revenge on him."'[304]

In the same way the just man in this psalm is unable to bear so much human malice: his soul seethes and his heart grows hot, but only within him. The blaze has not yet burst out but he seems to be very close to this point when he adds, 'a fire burned in my thoughts.' The fire has not yet flared forth but it roars within and is on the point of bursting out. The word *meditatio* here does not mean 'deliberation' but is synonymous with the Greek word μελέτη, in other words, a passionate desire to do something.[305] What then is the just man planning to do, now that he is all on fire? Undoubtedly men whose great anguish has got the better of them plan different things: sometimes a man's spirit is roused to vengeance, sometimes he considers whether his enemies can somehow be placated, either by his relinquishing the high status which provoked the grudge or by increasing his prosperity and raising his status to a level where he is beyond the reach of jealous attacks (for it is the lowest status and the highest which tend to be safe from the insults provoked by envy). Sometimes people decide to have recourse to magic; sometimes they prefer to put an end to their troubles by committing suicide. But when the just man perceives that revenge will only serve to make the attacks on him more savage and that if one of the Hydra's heads is chopped off,[306] others will spring forth, and when he considers that the cruelty of his persecutors cannot be cured, but that the soul of one of Christ's soldiers is not permitted to depart from his garrison without the permission of his commanding officer,[307] and finally, when he has

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304 Jer 20:7–10

305 Cf *In psalmum 1* CWE 63 30 and n126.

306 The Hydra of Lerna was one of the monsters which Heracles had to kill as one of his labours; each time one of the Hydra's heads was cut off, two new ones grew in its place.

307 Cf Cicero *Somnium Scipionis* 3 (*De re publica* 6.15).

carefully considered all human remedies but sees no escape from his misfortunes and no effective relief, realizing that he is hemmed in on all sides, he inevitably turns to the Lord. There is great hope of success when someone who is speechless in the face of unscrupulous men turns to address the Lord.

'I spoke with my tongue, Lord, let me know my end and what is the number of my days.' Earlier he was only talking to himself when he said, 'I have said, I shall guard my ways.' A person who speaks to himself does not need a tongue; but when the tongue is silent the mind sometimes talks a great deal and makes a lot of noise. Here he speaks with a tongue but it is still his own – in other words, a human tongue – and so he talks of human matters, but like Idythun he is leaping by stages to more perfect things. He has not yet received from the heavenly Spirit a tongue of fire which would resound with words of love rather than abuse and would pray for those who acted cruelly, but he is making gradual progress. It is good that he has begun to speak and it is good that he is addressing God, not men. Cursed is he who puts his trust in man.[308] It is true that he addresses God but he does not yet use his tongue to say things which are completely worthy of God.[309]

'Lord, let me know my end.' There will be an end to the church universal, just as there was an end to the Law and the prophets. The end of the Law brought an end to the waiting for the coming of the Lord, as well as an end to the types and rituals; the end of the church will put a stop to all the sufferings of the virtuous and the whole of creation will cease to groan,[310] and its existence will no longer be without purpose: that will be when Christ has handed over to God the Father the kingdom[311] which has been completely purged and is at peace.

All pious Jews wished to know the end of the Law, that is, the coming of Christ according to the flesh, but it was revealed only to very few and, even then, only enigmatically. 'Abraham saw that day and was glad.'[312] Daniel got to know it but as if through a cloud.[313] The apostles asked about

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308 Jer 17:5

309 LB V 445C here reads: 'sed nondum prorsus Deo digna loquitur lingua sua,' whereas ASD V-3 211:506, without noting the discrepancy, gives: 'sed nondum prorsus Deo digna loquitur. Quid loquitur lingua sua?' I have followed the LB text.

310 Cf Rom 8:22.

311 Cf 1 Cor 15:24.

312 John 8:56

313 Dan 7:13; cf *Adagia* I iii 63: *Per nebulam, per caliginem, per somnium.*

the end of the church: 'Lord, when will you appear and when will the kingdom of Israel come?' but they were told: 'It is not for you to know the times or moments which the Father has fixed by his own authority.'[314] But each person also has his own particular end, appointed by God and known only to God: it is not granted to man to know it[315] nor would it be of any use. And yet it is this which Idythun desires to know, afflicted as he is on all sides by the sharp remarks of wicked men; his mind is exhausted by misfortune and can find no rest. Blessed Job speaks in a similar way: 'Who will allow that my request be fulfilled, that God grant my desire? He who began may himself crush me. May he let loose his hand and cut me off. This would be my consolation, that in afflicting me he would not spare the pain, nor shall I deny the words of the holy one. For what is my strength, that I should endure? And what is my end, that I should be patient?'[316] The prophet Jonah also prays for death on account of his great anguish.[317] Good progress has been made when one reaches a state of contempt for this life and weariness with it; fortunate is the disaster which drives us to God.

'Let me know my end.' The end of human life is also the end of misfortune. Everlasting troubles know no end, but human troubles are more bearable because they cannot last long as man's life is itself short, and, if nothing else, death certainly brings an end to misfortune. The Lord seems to have felt something like this when he cried out: 'O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you? How long shall I endure you?'[318] And elsewhere in the Psalms it is written: 'Woe is me that my dwelling has been prolonged.'[319] Job felt like this when, provoked by severe temptation, he said: 'My soul is weary of life,'[320] and similarly 'My soul chooses hanging and my bones death.'[321] Even St Paul experienced the same feeling when he wrote to the Corinthians: 'We do not want you, brothers, to be ignorant of the affliction we experienced in Asia; we were terribly oppressed, beyond our strength, so that we found life itself unbearable. But we had the sentence of death in us so we did not rely on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.'[322]

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314 Acts 1:6–7
315 Cf Matt 13:11.
316 Job 6:8–11
317 Jon 4:3
318 Matt 17:17
319 Ps 119/120:5
320 Job 10:1
321 Job 7:15
322 2 Cor 1:8–9

Temptation is a painful thing for the flesh, but consider how beneficial it is for the chosen ones, preventing us from putting our trust in ourselves but rather trusting in God. Nothing is more dangerous for a man than to rely on his own strength, as if he could do anything by himself. Peter was self-confident before he was tempted, but his error taught him to place his hope in the Lord rather than in himself. It was the voice of self-confidence which said: 'Even if I must die with you, I shall not deny you.'[323] But his error made him more cautious and he then answered diffidently: 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.'[324]

And so, whenever God allows the storm of temptation to create in us a similar feeling, let us not give up hope completely or take refuge in the assistance which the world provides; instead let us turn our eyes to God, who will alleviate our suffering so that we can endure it. We do not have the capacity to prevent the mind from being agitated by possible problems but we can try to support it with the hope of speedy relief. The Lord accepted this distress when the torment of the cross was imminent, to provide us with an example which might prevent us from being similarly affected and rushing headlong into revenge or despair; instead we should lie prostrate, in other words not trust in our own resources but follow the Lord's example and pray at length, begging for divine support.

The servants should be eager to suffer what their master suffered and the limbs should cry out together with the head: 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.' This is the voice of the flesh but the Lord adds the voice of the spirit: 'Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.'[325] Far from expecting men to avenge him, the Lord even refused the protection of the angelic hosts. How many people there are who, when they experience quite trivial problems, find life unbearable and seek to escape by jumping from a great height or drowning themselves in a river or by using a noose or poison. But the just man does not attempt anything of this sort even when suffering the most painful torments. The weakness of the flesh makes him seek to know the end of his life, but he does not wish to learn it from magicians or fortune tellers, from mediums or chiromancers, from astrologers or soothsayers, as did Saul, but from the Lord who alone knows the beginnings of all things, their course and their end.

'Let me know my end,' he says. 'If it is close at hand, I shall endure with greater restraint the misfortunes which life brings, for they cannot

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323 Matt 26:35
324 John 21:17
325 Matt 26:39; cf *De taedio Jesu* CWE 70 62

continue beyond the end of life.' In the same way when a storm is brewing and everything threatens imminent death, the sailor wishes that a harbour might come into sight; if it is sighted quite near at hand in any direction, he is encouraged to hope that all will be well and, restored by this hope, he makes a more determined effort in his struggle against the onslaught of the waves and winds.

'And what is the number of my days.' Those who live in sorrow and who hope that time will bring relief by tempering their grief usually count not just the years but even the days and hours: for example, orphans whose lives are made difficult by strict guardians find their troubles become less severe the nearer they get to adulthood. In the same way St Paul, exhausted by misfortune, longed to depart and be with Christ,[326] who provides an end to all troubles. And in fact both good and wicked people, in times of anxiety, desire to know their end, but not for the same reasons. The wicked man consults the Babylonian astrologers so that when he is at last freed from misfortune he may compensate for his past troubles by indulging more greedily in the pleasures of the flesh. One of Epicurus' disciples writes: 'My friends, let us seize the opportunity of the day,'[327] and the wicked in the book of Wisdom speak in a similar way: 'The period of our life is short and wearisome. Our time is the passing of a shadow and there is no reversal of our end.' Thus far all this could equally well be said by good people. But how does it go on? 'Come then and let us enjoy the good things which exist and make use quickly of the creature as in our youth. Let us glut ourselves with precious wines and perfumes and let not the prime of our life pass by.'[328] In a poem which is undoubtedly elegantly expressed another writer uses the example of the rose which is born and dies on the same day to illustrate the fact that man's life is short and fleeting. But what conclusion does he draw from this? 'Gather roses, O maiden, while the flower is young and your youth is young. And remember that your life hastens on in the same way.'[329] What a fool! Just because he must certainly die he is willing to die shamefully, too.

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326 Phil 1:23

327 Horace *Epodes* 13.3–4

328 Wisd 2:1, 5–7

329 These lines from the poem *De rosis nascentibus* have variously been attributed to Virgil (cf Petrarch *Epistolae familiares* 1.2) and included in the Appendix Vergiliana, or to Ausonius (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica* [Berlin 1883] 5.2.243–5). Cf Hans Walther in *Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sententiae des Mittelalters* (Göttingen 1960) 2947 and *Versanfänge Mittellateinischer Dichtungen* (Göttingen 1969) 3029.

So much for the wicked. What about the just man? He goes on to say, 'that I may know what I lack.' He wishes to become perfect rather than merely being released from his troubles. He wants to be told what period of life remains to him so that he can take all the more care to conciliate God by doing good deeds and to pack up his belongings ready for departure. And he does not think it matters particularly how long he lives as long as he departs from this life in a state free from sin. He knows that temptation is inflicted by God because of men's sins and so, if he were to be told that the end of his life was imminent, he would fear that he might die without being sufficiently purified. But if he finds that he has many years of life left, he rejoices that God has granted him time for repentance so that he can compensate for the sins of his past life by doing good. For Paul to live was Christ and to die was gain:[330] if life were granted to him, he could win Christ over to himself more and more by means of good works; but if death should be revealed, he considered it a gain. For death brings a twofold gain to the virtuous man – an end to the misfortunes of this life and the beginning of eternal happiness.

After this he says: 'Behold, you have made my days measurable,' as if he had received the answer that he did not have long to live. Instead of 'measurable' Jerome gives the translation 'short,' thereby expressing the sense rather than giving the literal meaning. Some people point out that the Hebrew word means 'the measure of a handful,' for generally when reference is being made to the smallest amount of something, people call it a handful, in other words, as much as you can grasp with one hand or fist. Furthermore, the word which the Septuagint translates as παλαιστάς is translated by Symmachus[331] as σπιθαμάς, for *spithame* is the Greek for 'span,' in other words, the extent of the hand when it is spread out flat, which we use for measuring things. Just as we use the hand with fingers outstretched to measure distance, so we use the closed fist to measure a collection of many things. The Greek name for such a measurement was δῶρον or δόχμη because we give with hand extended. But the smaller span, known as the *palaesta*, comprises the four fingers joined together, while the larger span is of twelve fingers' breadth, with the hand opened out and stretching from the top of the thumb to the top of the middle finger. However, if we are to

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330 Phil 1:21

331 Symmachus made a fresh translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek in the second century AD, preferring a readable style to verbal accuracy. His version was incorporated into Origen's *Hexapla*; for the Psalms see PG 16 567–1266.

believe the Greek etymologies, the σπιθαμή should really be translated the larger span, called in Greek παρὰ τὸ ἀποσπᾶσθαι τοὺς δακτύλους because of the spreading '*apospasthai*' of the fingers; the παλαιστή is the smaller span, called παρὰ τὸ πελάζειν τὰ ὀστᾶ because the bones of the fingers are set side by side. But if the δόχμη or δῶρον or *palaista* consists of four fingers put together, the *spithame* – the larger span – would be made up of twelve fingers, in other words, nine thumbs' breadth. Both terms serve to indicate the brevity of our lifespan:[332] if you think in terms of the extent of life, then it has the shortest possible length; if you think of it as gathered into one whole, it forms the smallest amount.

Furthermore, παλαιστάς, which is the word given by the Septuagint, was translated in different ways in the Latin versions. Some translated it as 'you have established my days of old' because παλαιός means 'old' in Greek. But whatever grows old is moving towards its destruction and our life is nothing but a movement towards death: eternity alone is unacquainted with old age. In the opinion of others the correct reading was *palaistas*, as if it referred to wrestlers, because this life is a battle and a struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. I admit that both versions could be correct, but I think that those people hit the mark who explain that *palaistas* are architectural measurements used in measuring timber, made up of four straight fingers placed together. This is the architects' shortest measurement, for cubits and ten foot lengths are longer: that is why even nowadays when we wish to indicate in proverbial form the smallest amount of something, we call it a morsel or handful or a finger's breadth.[333] In the same way when Isaiah wished to present to us vividly the smallness of the whole world in comparison with the immensity of God, he says, 'who measured the earth with his palm,'[334] using the word σπιθαμή. And the church choir sings the neatly expressed lines, 'holding the world in his hand, he was held within the ark of the womb.'[335]

In fact, all these variations point in the same direction, making us understand that man's life is not only short but also wretched and full of

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332 Cf *Adagia* II ii 69: *Spithama vitae*.

333 *Adagia* III v 40: *Ne bolus quidem relictus* and I v 6: *Latum unguem*; cf Origen *Homilia in psalmum 38* 9 PG 12 1399; André Godin *Érasme lecteur d'Origène* (Geneva 1982) 407.

334 Isa 40:12

335 These lines are taken from the fourth verse of the hymn attributed to Venantius Fortunatus, *Quem terra, pontus, aethera colunt*, used at Matins and Lauds on feasts of the Virgin Mary: 'Beata mater munere, / cuius supernus artifex, / mundum pugillo continens, / ventris sub arca clausus est' PL 88 265B.

hardship. The fact that it is full of hardship is due to the sin of Adam who was told: 'By the sweat of your brow shall you eat your bread.'[336] And later the span of man's life was limited to a short period because of the excessive wickedness of mankind, with the result that, although before the flood some people had lived for more than six hundred and eighty years, after it the average life span was reduced to seventy years;[337] and now man's life has not only been shortened but has also become exposed to more diseases and catastrophes. Nowadays, even if illness or some particular physical weakness does not bring a premature death, one cannot expect to live more than eighty years at most. But why is it that even today we see some people living beyond this limit? It is true that a very few people do live longer, but life beyond the age of eighty cannot be called life: it should rather be called 'trouble and pain' according to the testimony of another psalm.[338] For who would call it life when the whole body trembles, the eyes cloud over, the ears go deaf, the tongue stammers, the voice fades, the teeth have fallen out, the feet falter and no part of the body can perform its proper function; even the mental powers are failing and the intellect becomes less acute, the rational faculties become paralysed, the memory retains nothing and – as with the mythical jar of the Danaids[339] – no sooner is something poured into it than it trickles out. Should this not be more accurately described as a protracted death than as life?

God set this limit to human life because he was angered by men's wickedness for it seemed that they would go on sinning for ever if they were allowed to go on living for ever. But in fact, because of our sins, we drastically shorten the lives which God has already shortened and we make them much more unhappy than they were. For what is the cause of so many types of disease and so many premature deaths if not excessive indulgence in luxury and sensuality? Or what causes more misfortune for man than man himself? But why does the just man mention the brevity and misery of life? Not because he is murmuring against God who made it so. God is just and does nothing without a reason. In fact God did not make it so: he created man virtuous but it is as a result of sin that our lives are short and miserable. And so the just man does not mention these things in order to

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336 Gen 3:19

337 On the medieval topos of the human lifespan, see John Burrow *The Ages of Man* (Oxford 1986) 191–202. On the brevity of human life, a recurring theme in Erasmus' writings, see Chomarat I 72 n86, 708.

338 Ps 89/90:10

339 Cf *Adagia* I x 33: *Inexplebile dolium*.

blame God but to move him to pity, should he deign to consider the brevity of human life which is of a moment's length – it is but an instant compared to eternity – and should he be willing to contemplate the misfortunes which make this life difficult for all men, although some have been given more bitterness, some less.

It is this spectacle which he invites God to consider when he says 'behold.' In the same way, beggars expose their sores to the eyes of passers-by so as to arouse pity, hoping for alms from anyone who turns to look at them. It is with a similar intention that the blessed Job mentions the brevity of human life in the hope of provoking the Lord to pity: 'Spare me, O Lord, for my days are nothing.'[340] And in another passage, after mentioning life's brevity and misery, he adds: 'And so you think he is worthy to open your eyes on one of this kind and to take him with you to justice?'[341] For this very reason some people are exempted from the effects of a powerful person – because they seem unworthy of anger, just as the eagle does not seize flies[342] and the lion does not rage against the mouse. Seeing that Saul in his cruelty was appeased for a time by the voice of David crying out: 'Whom are you persecuting, king of Israel? Whom are you persecuting? You are persecuting a dead dog and a single flea,'[343] how much more will the mention of our weakness appease God who is by nature gentle and easily moved?

'Behold, what is my life but a handful of days? And my substance is as nothing before you.' Those whose life here continues until the age of eighty are said to have lived a long time, but the life of man, however long, is hardly a moment of time compared to that vast eternity which knows neither beginning nor end. And yet we divide up this instant as if it amounted to something, into childhood, youth, manhood, and old age! We buy, we sell, we build, we extend our country estates, we seek to gain kingdoms, we organize rebellions as if we would live for ever. The reason is that, attached to the earth as we are, we do not raise our eyes to the things which truly exist and are everlasting.

Furthermore, just as the span of human life, compared to eternity, is the merest handful, so man's substance is nothing in comparison with that incomprehensible substance which is always the same as itself, undergoing no change, although it creates, recreates, changes, moves, and governs all

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340 Job 7:16
341 Job 14:3
342 *Adagia* III ii 65: *Aquila non captat muscas*
343 1 Kings/1 Sam 24:15/14

things. For in this psalm he uses the word 'substance' (that is, *ὑπόστασιν*, not *οὐσίαν*) for something which subsists by itself and which firmly exists. But God alone truly exists by himself, independent of anything else, while he himself supports all things which appear to us to exist, although in fact nothing in human life remains stable and everything passes away. If you ask a logician whether man is a substance, he will answer, 'yes, of course,' but if you put the same question to a philosopher who contemplates eternal things with a spiritual gaze, he will say that man is a shadow, not a substance, even if you put before him a strong and well-built young man. If man is a bubble[344] compared to God, is it not much more appropriate for the things which ordinary men pursue in this life to be called bubbles and shadows? Wealth, beauty, strength, honours, and pleasures – these are things which are often snatched from people at the whim of fortune even while they are still alive, and even if they endure for a very long time, yet death at last takes all away. Whatever we find in this world, whether it is something to pursue or to avoid, is a shadow, a wisp of smoke floating past and soon to vanish. What is this life but a torrent which flows with great force, carrying everything away to destruction? Anyone who clings to things which have no substance is driven about by the waves, as it says in another psalm: 'The waters have come up to my soul and there is no stability.'[345] The person who wishes to stand firm should set himself on the solid rock which is Jesus Christ, 'who is yesterday and today and the same forever.'[346]

I should point out that the particle 'ante' (*ἐνώπιόν σου* in Greek, in other words, in your sight) should be taken with both parts of the preceding verse. The life of man is of a moment's duration in the eyes of God who alone truly lives and truly exists. The whole of time, however long it may appear to man, is but an instant to him who is in no way limited by time. In comparison with man, a crow is long-lived;[347] in comparison with wax, iron is something solid; if you compare one man with another, one will seem long-lived, the other to have only a short life: but as soon as they are put before God, all things are worthless and transitory. Is it then surprising that the span of human life is as nothing in God's eyes, seeing that the whole period between the time when the world began and when it is to finish is

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344 *Adagia* II iii 48: *Homo bulla*
345 Ps 68:2–3/69:1–2
346 Heb 13:8
347 The crow was traditionally seen as long-lived; see Isidore of Seville *Etymologiae* 12.7.44.

but an instant in the sight of God? It is no surprise if the substance of one man is as nothing before God since, according to Isaiah: 'All nations are as nothing in his sight and they are considered as nothing and emptiness,' and further: 'My substance is as nothing before you.'[348] What in man appears to be of great substance is as nothing in God's eyes.

In fact the mind is the more substantial part of a man and reason is the more substantial part of the mind, and yet this substance, too, is worth nothing before God without whom man's natural faculties can achieve nothing. As soon as this substance was corrupted by sin and deprived of the grace of God from which it derived its value, it was reduced to nothing and needed someone to restore it just as it had needed someone to create it before it existed. For no one can recreate himself, just as no one can create himself in the first place. But a man's substance is never more truly nought before God than when he thinks he is something. 'If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing,' says the Apostle, 'then he is deceiving himself.'[349] A person who persuades another that a piece of glass is a precious stone is called a fraud, but someone who deceives himself, convinced that he is something which he is not, is more of a fraud. Anyone, however, who begins to acknowledge that of himself he is nothing, has already, by this very fact, begun to be something – in other words, 'some kind of beginning of his creature,' in the words of St James,[350] or 'the beginning of his substance,' according to St Paul.[351] He has already begun to be transformed in Christ, for whoever is in Christ is a new creature.[352] Similarly the same apostle warns us that whoever thinks he is wise should become a fool so that he may be wise,[353] and all people must be warned that anyone who thinks he is something should become nothing so that he might truly be something. Let him cast off the old man so that God may create a new man in him.

But to make you perceive clearly that you are nothing of yourself, you should come forward into the sight of God, so that you do not compare yourself with men, as did the Pharisee who thought he was just in comparison with the publican.[354] Thus a man may appear handsome when

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348 Isa 40:17; Ps 38:6/39:5
349 Gal 6:3
350 James 1:18
351 Heb 3:14
352 Cf 2 Cor 5:17.
353 1 Cor 3:18
354 Cf Luke 18:11–12.

compared with an uglier person, rich when compared with a poorer person, wise compared with someone more stupid, and just when set side by side with someone less just: in fact, all these are as nothing when they stand before God. Man is a distorted mirror to other men: God alone reveals what is truly good, for he is the true light, in which the illusions created by insubstantial images disappear and those things whose splendid appearance dazzles men's eyes are shown to be deceptive. It is a calling by God which makes a man something, not man's own powers, for he calls into existence, according to St Paul, the things which do not exist.[355] And so in order that you may be called, you must be as nothing in your own eyes, but offer him a heart pounded into dust and, so to speak, reduced to nothing. Out of dry dust he will recreate soft clay with the liquid of his grace and from the clay he will make an honourable vessel in the house of the Lord.[356] We must raise our mind to this point so that it may realize that all its substance is as nothing.

Idythun has already reached this point. Has not this leaper of ours made an exceptional leap? He has leaped over all earthly things, all the heavens and, in addition, the angels, and all things affected by time and change, and has reached the very summit of eternity. Someone might say: 'What point is there in contemplating this wretched and transitory life?' It enables us, whatever our lot in life may be, to possess the seemingly good things as if we did not possess them;[357] and whatever unfortunate things occur, it allows us to bear them with greater equanimity. Does anyone fix his love on something which he knows to be deceptive and which he is aware he will soon have to leave behind? On the other hand, is anyone such a coward that he does not bravely endure something which he knows must soon finish and will be brought to an end in such a way that eternal bliss replaces temporary troubles? Moreover, we are able to bear things more calmly if we share them with the whole human race. Consequently Idythun rebukes himself, as it were, because he complained of his misfortune as if it were his own personal one, peculiar to him, whereas it is a characteristic of human life and common to all men. We cannot, however, blame God for it, for we bear it as a consequence of sin: this is the reason for the brevity of human life, this is the cause of so many types of misfortune that they are beyond counting, this is the cause of man's great mental blindness and perversity. So Idythun says to himself something like this: 'Why do you

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355 Rom 4:17
356 Cf 2 Tim 2:21.
357 Cf 2 Cor 6:10.

complain in this way only of your own fate?[358] Cast your eyes over all the races of mankind and you will see that what you think is the result of misfortune is part of the human condition. "Indeed, the whole is vanity, every living man."' He does not say 'all things' but uses the word *σύμπαντα*, in other words, 'everything together.' He calls it vanity, not a lie, but something which is useless, empty, and deceptive. Trivial and empty are all those things which men do in the world, relying on their own resources, fighting among themselves because of their conflicting interests. One man will do and suffer anything in order to be honoured; another is intent on accumulating wealth; another smears himself all over with the honey of pleasures and decides that if he cannot live long, he will make sure he lives comfortably. Is there anyone who does not consider it an outstanding achievement to obtain the most important position at the ruler's side or even the leadership itself, or to attain a position of authority in the church, the impressive status of bishop, the dignity of a cardinal, or to reach the supreme heights of the papacy? Who does not consider fortunate the man who happens to gain a splendid inheritance while he sleeps? Who does not think the man lucky who lives in the lap of luxury? Similarly, one man weeps because he has been rejected or deprived of a high position; another mourns the loss of his wealth in war or in a shipwreck: he has been submerged by troubles instead of pleasures. The former types are commonly called happy, the latter wretched. But what does Idythun say? 'All together is vanity.' Indeed human happiness is not true happiness and human misfortune is not true misfortune: you will perceive the truth of this if you compare the transitory things which you see in the world with eternal things. (Idythun did not say, 'all is vain' but *ἐμφατικῶς*, 'all is vanity': we use this figure of speech when we call a man who is very wicked 'a crime' and someone who is very corrupt 'a disgrace.') Nor is it surprising if everything under the sun is vanity, since man himself, for whose sake all these things were created, is vanity.

The second part of the verse reads 'every living man' (or as Jerome translated it, 'every man continuing steadfastly,' while someone else has translated the phrase as 'standing forever').[359] And so, anyone who wishes to escape from the deceptiveness of human existence ought to depart from this life. The rich 'stand' here, they whose source of comfort lies in this

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358 The reading of LB, *sortem*, has been preferred over the ASD reading, *fortem*.

359 This reading is given by Aquila, who produced a literal Greek version of the Old Testament in the second century AD for the use of Jews, to replace the Septuagint which had been adopted by the Christians; his version was included by Origen in his *Hexapla* PG 15–16.

world and who wish this life to last for ever; the person who is completely attached to this world 'continues steadfastly' to exist and does not leap up into the heavens in spirit as Idythun does here: he is now, as it were, standing on a lofty point, looking down from on high on all that the world contains. He has leapt over the earth, the moon, the sun, and finally all the heavens, and he has perceived that there is nothing anywhere which is not deceptive until we pass across to that creator of all things in whom alone all things are true, pure and everlasting.

The pause '*diapsalma*' inserted at this point indicates that he is engaged for a while in contemplating created things, in order that he might be inflamed with a greater desire for that life in which there is no change, no shadow of mutability.[360] Let us, too, dearest friends, move quickly up to that place to which Idythun has leaped and let us join him for a moment in reflecting that there is nothing under the sun which is not deceptive. We should contemplate this earth, a solid element which sustains and nourishes us and yet is exposed to so many evils; it produces a great number of disasters for mankind and is often ripped apart by earthquakes, bringing buildings crashing down and burying men beneath the debris. Sometimes the earth subsides and swallows up whole cities in a chasm, together with their inhabitants. In some places it hurls out ashes, smoke, and flames and often exhales a pestilential vapour from its caves. Do I need to mention here the armies buried under heaps of sand or the sands which swallow everything which falls into them? Do I need to mention those deceptive areas which plunge the person who enters them into an abyss? How many creatures does it produce for us which either have a deadly power or give out a lethal poison? and how many kinds of fruit and herbs containing poisons so effective that they cause immediate death? It is often the case that the more attractive they are to look at, the more harmful they are. The service berry, which is quite beautiful, causes men to choke dramatically; honey, whose deadly viscosity can kill the person who tastes it,[361] is sweeter than anything else – you might say that nature is not a mother but a stepmother plotting to kill her stepchildren. She can also deceive because of the fact that things often look similar: is not a snake often taken for an eel and then the error proves fatal? Has not hemlock, eaten by mistake instead of thyme, many times been the cause of death? Furthermore, nature repeatedly frustrates the hopes of the farmer.

Water is no less a source of destruction. There are springs of the clear-

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360 Cf James 1:17.

361 Pliny mentions the existence of poisonous honey in his *Natural History* 21.44.74.

est water which cause death if someone drinks from them. Has not the sea caused many disasters when it spreads over the land, obliterating innumerable villages and towns in one surge? Rivers also flood and so do lakes, causing an unbelievable amount of damage to property and loss of human life. When the sea changes course, it turns fields into swamps and fertile land into barren desert. It is quite common for such areas to give off vapours which are deadly to human beings. The sea also contains fish, such as the scorpion, stingray, and seaslug, whose sting is deadly or which cause death when they are touched or eaten. Furthermore, does not the sea make treacherous attacks on sailors in many different ways? Apart from the violence of the winds and waves, there are the sandy flats concealed by the waves and the rocks on which ships are wrecked. As if that were not enough, the sea contains deep holes and whirlpools which spin a ship round and round and swallow it up; it has mountains and caves, too, which draw a ship on from a great distance. Need I give any more examples of this element which causes mankind more disasters than almost any other?

We breathe the air and are kept alive by it but it often causes death. Fire is the purest of the elements but how many catastrophes and deaths does it not bring mankind each day? If we look up at the sky we see the source of floods and hail which destroy crops and of lightning which brings sudden death. From the sky come comets, whose different configurations presage death and threaten man with terrifying evils. Look up even higher and you reach the heavenly spheres, the lowest of which is the moon. These heavenly bodies are enormous, beautiful, and uncompounded – that is why they suffer no change or decay. But even in this region there occur eclipses of the sun and moon, conjunction or divergence in the relation between certain stars, withdrawals, consumption by fire, and retrograde movements: do these not cause many catastrophes for men, cattle, trees, and crops?

Reflecting on such things, Idythun perceives that all creatures are prey to a terrible insecurity. And yet man is superior to all these and it is for his sake that everything which this world contains has been created, but his existence is liable to so many misfortunes that it was not without good reason that someone said that there is no creature more wretched than man.[362] I need not here describe in detail his painful birth, his miserable infancy, his childhood exposed to countless injustices, his fleeting adolescence, his troublesome youth, his manhood during which he is tortured by innumerable worries, his old age harder to bear than Etna or Mount Athos, and his

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362 Cf Homer *Iliad* 17.446–7; and *Lingua* CWE 29 263.

death, inevitable for all although the time of death is known to none. I shall not mention all the types of disease (for new ones are always appearing),[363] all the unforeseen and unavoidable accidents, such things as humble birth, poverty, and ugliness, and, if you consider the human mind, its slowness, ignorance, stupidity, and forgetfulness. What a lot of bitterness is mixed in with those very things which attract men because they appear to bring happiness and in which they hope to find comfort!

I am not speaking about vices, for disgraceful conduct is always entirely futile; but how much worry, how many troubles, even legitimate honours produce, even if one performs one's duty properly, for people are so hard to satisfy and so ungrateful. The holding of high office exposes one to envy, while a humble position makes one subject to contempt and injustice. What point is there in talking about riches? The Lord himself calls them thorns.[364] Marriage can be a comfort, but it involves much more bitterness than sweetness.[365] It is a delight to have children, but there are few people whose children turn out in such a way that they do not regret having had them. There remains friendship, the prime source of comfort in human life. But even there trust is rare and inconstancy is common, as are hypocrisy and treachery – so friendship can cause men more unhappiness than anything else. Relatives and connections by marriage cause a lot of trouble too, so that those who are keen to lead a pleasant and peaceful life believe that it is of great importance to ensure that one lives as far as possible from one's family. Some people find pleasure in liberal studies and in contemplating nature, withdrawn from public affairs, but how much hardship is involved in this way of life too! Think of all the error, mental blindness, and dissension! Indeed, even if you were to comprehend all philosophy to the full, these things would not bring peace of mind; and when man reaches the point of death, he cries out that he has wasted his life in trivialities.

And then what of the fact that theology itself is full of conflicting opin-

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363 Erasmus may here have in mind the contemporary spread of syphilis, thought by some to have been brought to Europe after Columbus' discovery of America. See eg Girolano Fracastoro's poem, *Syphilis*, published in 1530 ed and trans G. Eatough, Liverpool 1984; and the article by H. Brabant 'Épidemies et médecins au temps d'Érasme' in *Colloquia Erasmiana Turonensia: Douzième stage international d'études humanistes*, ed J.-C. Margolin (Paris and Toronto 1972) I 515–38. In his dedicatory letter prefixed to the *Lingua* (CWE 29 257, 259) Erasmus discussed the spread of new diseases in his time; see also *De bello Turcico* CWE 64 212 and n5.

364 Cf Matt 13:22; Luke 8:14.

365 Cf n4 above: *Adagia* I viii 66: *Plus aloes, quam mellis habet*; Juvenal 6 181.

ions and pedantic criticisms from the majority? Sincerity is so rare and there is such a passion for slander that many people are repelled and offended by theology.

In short, there is no occupation so fortunate that it does not contain many unpleasant qualities which have to be endured. Solitude is by its very nature painful and empty, but as a member of a community man is tormented by disagreements and disputes. Are not even men's good deeds largely motivated by self-interest? Is there anyone who can distribute alms while looking so steadily at Christ alone that no vainglory creeps up on him and no hint of favouritism or hope that the good deed will be rewarded or any similar human emotion?

We sing hymns, we pray, we meditate, but how much lethargy and laziness we experience while we do these things! We are often beset by empty thoughts which break our concentration so that after praying we often need to say more prayers to ask forgiveness for not paying due attention in our original prayers. Does any man love his fellow man purely for the sake of Christ? Who desires his neighbour's well-being as much as he does his own? How far even those men who are famous for their piety are from that love which God demands of us. If someone were to wander among those communities of monks which are so highly esteemed, he would admit that the ancient Greek proverb is very true which states that many graze but few till the soil, πολλοὶ βουκέυται, παῦροι δέ τε γῆς αροτῆρες.[366] If even these things which men believe to be the source of happiness are futile in this life, then it must be impossible for anyone to find lasting happiness in this world where everything – even man in his entirety – is equally futile.

The phrase πᾶς ἄνθρωπος can be interpreted in this way: *pas* can mean both 'every' and 'the whole of.' That is why the ancients generally called this whole world τὸ πᾶν, because it contained all species of things. But man himself comprises a primary division between body and soul: the body is equipped with five senses, the mind also with five and everything that man plans or achieves by using these faculties is futile, as the prophet declares with good reason: 'All flesh is grass and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.'[367] It is true that some people appear to possess outstanding qualities, such as beauty or strength, physical health or sharp senses, quick-wittedness or resourcefulness, a retentive memory or eloquence; but however outstanding you imagine these to be, it is all vanity in comparison with

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366 Cf *Adagia* I vii 9: *Multi qui boves stimulent, pauci aratores* 'Few men can plough though many ply the goad.'

367 Isa 40:6

that eternity, and however much a man excels in these qualities, he is just a nonentity.

Now, if you agree, we shall leave the *diapsalma* and return to the psalm itself: 'But yet man passes in a shadow.' It may not be clear whether this short line confirms what was said above or whether it contradicts it. Jerome gives *tantum* 'to such an extent' instead of *verum tamen* 'but yet,' although I suspect that he wrote *tamen* but that this was corrupted by scribal error.[368] And so I think it would be more correct to take it as having an adversative meaning for this reason: although there is nothing anywhere in this world which is not deceptive when compared with those things which truly exist, nevertheless the common run of men walk in a shadow, in other words among empty and shadowy things, as if they were permanent and real. Nor do they merely walk among these things; they also cling to them and are carried away by them. It is because of them that people organize rebellions, go to sea, wage wars, undertake lawsuits, lend money at interest, cheat, and perjure themselves. Man does these things because he is frivolous and so takes pleasure in frivolous things. For what is he if not a man, who loves only what he sees? Such were they in part who were rebuked by the Apostle when he said: 'Are you not men?' and also those to whom he says: 'If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.'[369]

Now Idythun has raised himself above man and has leaped out of the cave in which, according to Plato, the people who are held fast there are aware only of the shadow of things. But that wise man who saw reality in the light of day, cries out to no effect: 'Why do you act like madmen, you wretched creatures? These are illusory images of things which make you applaud, rejoice, feel sad, or frightened. There is nothing real there; they are illusions created by shadows which either terrify or delight you.'[370] Similarly, now that Idythun is high above the world, he is amazed by men's madness, for they neglect the good things which are real and cling to the insubstantial reflection of good things, while they shrink from the illusions of suffering in this life but hurl themselves into the real sufferings of eternity. A man may think he can find rest among the benefits of this life, but he must pass through and move on whether he likes it or not. For the outward

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368 Cf Jerome *Liber psalmorum* PL 28 (1846) 1157; Chomarat I 669.

369 1 Cor 3:4; Gal 1:10

370 Plato *Republic* 7.514–17. Cf *In psalmum 4* CWE 63 180; *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 107; Screech 90.

appearance of this world passes away[371] and takes with it anyone who is attached to it, however unwilling he may be. And even if these things were permanent, man is still forced to pass beyond them and if he were to remain, the things themselves still pass away. It is like someone travelling on a ship: he may fall asleep but the ship moves on nonetheless. And so it is as if the prophet were saying: 'Here is pure wheat and yet you delight in acorns; here is unmixed wine and yet you drink muddy water; here is the purest gold and yet you work among piles of rubble; here are genuine jewels, but you prefer shards of glass.'

The word which the Septuagint gives as ταράσσεται (in other words, 'is disturbed') is translated by some as 'makes a noise'; this phrase aptly signifies the commotion of the people endlessly fighting for things which are transitory and illusory. What is the life of a prince, a bishop, a merchant, or a craftsman but some absurd or, rather, wretched disturbance? One man is completely absorbed in extending his authority as if he were going to live for ever, even though no one can definitely guarantee for himself one day's life. Someone else rushes in pursuit of wealth regardless of right or wrong, and the more he accumulates, the greedier he becomes. He does not listen to the words of the Gospel: 'You fool, this night they will seek your soul from you and to whom then will these things belong which you have accumulated?'[372]

And so those who have joined Idythun in his leap over all the heights of human happiness and who have contemplated with the eyes of faith the Ideas[373] of things which are truly good, do not enjoy this world capriciously and in passing, as it were; they make use of it as if they were not using it.[374] But anyone who is still only a man and who has not yet cast off the old man of clay[375] lays up his treasures in this world[376] as if he has already reached his home country instead of being a guest staying for a few days in a foreign land. He stores things up in the world as if it had some permanence, although there are here only unreal and deceptive shadows of things. He gathers things together here, although it is a place for scattering; he stores things up here where nothing is secure, nothing safe; he saves things here

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371 1 Cor 7:31
372 Luke 12:20
373 Plato *Republic* 7.507–8
374 Cf 1 Cor 7:31; Augustine *De doctrina Christiana* 1.22 PL 34 26.
375 Cf Eph 4:22; Col 3:9.
376 Matt 6:19

where he cannot remain for long and he does not know who will enjoy what he has saved after he is gone – for it is usually of some comfort to those departing this life to have procured the heir they want, but greedy people often use this as a pretence to try to justify their vice. 'I am not saving these things for myself but for my children,' they say. This is the voice of duty speaking, but it is a cover for wicked behaviour, as Augustine elegantly says.[377] When people say that they are not saving it for themselves but in order to set up a shrine or build a college, their purpose appears honest but you do not really know for whom you are saving these things. If it is for your children, perhaps you will not have any, or if you do, who knows whether any of them will survive you or whether they will turn out such that you consider them worthy to succeed to your property, for many fathers disinherit their sons and disown them. If you are saving for some pious purpose, a thief may perhaps steal what you have put away or it may be destroyed by war or fire. Perhaps a gambler or some wasteful person or spendthrift will squander what you have accumulated to put to pious uses. Some people deposit their money with usurers in the hope of receiving a profit from their investment. But if nothing else, it sometimes happens that they run away when the bank has gone broke, so to speak, and you lose your capital as well as the interest. You can obtain as many guarantees as you like but nowhere will you find a safe place to hide what you have accumulated unless you store it in heaven. Anyone who distributes his possessions to alleviate the immediate needs of the poor is laying them up in a safe place and knows for whom he is collecting his treasures: he has laid them up in the bosom of Christ, who will guard unto life everlasting what has been deposited with him. What you deposit is of little value but what you are given in return is inestimably precious. Why do you bury your treasure in the earth, you miser? You can bury it as deep as you like but thieves and robbers can still reach it. Even nowadays people who are digging in the fields or building the foundations of a house often come across unexpected treasures. Those who put them there did so in the hope that they would be safe, so as to keep them for some special project such as building a villa or arranging a magnificent marriage for their daughter or procuring some splendid position, but look how the treasure fell into the hands of those who were the last people the man who buried it wished to acquire it.

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377 Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 38* PL 36 422

The word treasure refers not only to gold, jewels, and such like but also to anything which a man values highly and which he expects to be a source of happiness and comfort to him in this life. Think of all the things which some people do and put up with in order to complete their education: they learn one language after another, study one subject after another, always adding something to their treasure. Death, however, often puts an unexpected end to all their efforts; there and then all those sleepless nights of hard work over the years are wasted once and for all. The same is true of those who seek high office, for it often happens that they are disappointed of what they seek to gain through great hardships and at enormous expense. Thus it happens that what they expected would provide them with a peaceful life turns out to be a source of disaster; what they hoped would provide them with pleasures brings with it extreme suffering instead.

However, people who acquire their treasures judiciously accumulate things over which fortune has no jurisdiction and deposit them where no thief can break in and no moth can destroy them.[378] Anyone who has become like Idythun can see that such things are utterly futile; he sees that men get worked up to no purpose for the sake of the worthless things from which they seek comfort. For foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests.[379]

But what about Idythun, then, who is afflicted by the evils of this world and finds no relief for his suffering? He surveys all mortal things but sees nothing in which the mind can find rest and he is not permitted to seek an end to his troubles by means of suicide. Where can he turn in his uncertainty, he who holds in contempt all that this life contains and who is not yet allowed to escape to the next life? What consolation will he find in the meantime to sustain his dejected spirit which is on the point of exhaustion? He turns his gaze from visible things to those which are invisible but hoped for,[380] from the present to the future; for the greatest source of comfort in distress is an unwavering hope.

'And now what is my expectation,' he says, 'if not the Lord?' Similarly Jeremiah, amidst the storms of misfortune, says: 'The Lord is my portion, says my soul. Therefore I shall hope in him,' and a little later on, 'It is good that one should wait in silence for the salvation of the Lord.'[381] The same

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378 Cf Matt 6:19–20.
379 Matt 8:20; Luke 9:58
380 Cf Rom 8:24.
381 Lam 3:24, 26

idea occurs in Psalm 39: 'Blessed is the man who places his hopes in the Lord and does not turn to illusion and deceptive follies.'[382] Yet he too is blessed who abandons what is futile and puts his hope firmly in the Lord.

There is very little difference between hope and expectation except that hope can exist in varying degrees of intensity – strong, moderate or feeble; one can also hope for things which are far away. Expectation, however, is a powerful feeling and it is directed towards something which is already visible and close at hand. The Latin word derives from the fact that people who are seized by a violent desire for something usually keep a constant watch to see if it is coming. The Greek word *καραδοκία* has the same emphasis although the Greek translator does not use this word here but rather *ὑπομονήν*, which means 'endurance.' St Luke uses this word in his twenty-first chapter when he writes: 'By your endurance you will gain your lives';[383] and similarly St Paul writes in the second chapter of his letter to the Romans 'by patience in good deeds,'[384] using the phrase *καθ' ὑπομονήν*. This word is perfectly applicable to someone who holds on in misfortune in the expectation of a reward, and is sustained by hope, which prevents him from collapsing, crushed by the burden of his misfortunes. But people who put their confidence in the benefits of this life are relying on a reed which will break, not only depriving them of support but also often piercing their hand. 'Cursed is he who puts his trust in man,'[385] but anyone who puts his hope in the things of this world is equally cursed. Human error takes many forms, but piety has only a single purpose. In this world there are many different kinds of things but they are all illusory, and so you must flee from the many and take refuge in the one. 'And now what is my expectation?' What consolation is there amidst such terrible misfortunes? There is only one but it is more effective than all the others put together. What is it? What but the Lord? What Lord? He who declares in the Gospel: 'Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden and I shall refresh you.'[386] The loss of all else is a small price to pay for this pearl.[387]

The conjunction 'and' adds to the emphasis and the adverb 'now' is not superfluous either: it has the effect of giving a focus to the sentence. When everything offered by the world has proved to be of little value,

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382 Ps 39:5/40:4
383 Luke 21:19
384 Rom 2:7
385 Jer 17:5
386 Matt 11:28
387 Cf Matt 13:46.

when no respite is granted from the misfortunes of this life, what is left but that I should put my hope firmly in the Lord? Faith and hope will pass away when we behold the glory of the Lord with face unveiled.[388] But for the moment, while we pass our time in darkness in this world and while we can only see images reflected as in a distorted mirror,[389] our happiness is not a reality but rather a matter of hope. Human hope frequently fails, but hope that is placed firmly in the Lord never causes despair or shame because it never fails. You hear the profession of a Christian. Anyone who sets his hopes anywhere except in the Lord is a Christian in name more than in fact.

Now the question itself intensifies the feeling of confidence: since all things contained in this world are futile, what remains for me except to throw myself completely on the Lord who alone can make me rich, respected, powerful, wise, and happy? Anyone who has reconciled himself to the Lord has lived long enough. Blessed is the man who is dead to the world and lives for the Lord, but blessed, too, are they who die in the Lord.[390] Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's,[391] and they who are his are safe; they cannot perish even if the world is crushed and collapses.[392]

And so, with his whole being intent on the Lord, he says to him: '"And my substance is with you." People who rely on perishable things which have no permanence are building on sand, but my substance is with you. If there is any good in me, it comes from you, the source of all that is good; and my substance is in your hands, for with you are stored the rewards for virtuous people who perform good deeds.' Only things which are in the Lord's hands are safe. The substance of those who boast of their merits is not with the Lord but in their own hands and so they lose what they appear to possess. Yet even things which are in themselves illusory become substantial if you deposit them with the Lord. If by chance you were to be of noble birth or to have wealth, a wife to your liking, children, talent, physical strength or health, these things would be illusory unless you deposited them with him whose generosity has granted them to you. One should have the same attitude to all human benefits: if you kept them in your possession, the worm of arrogance would destroy them and the devil would steal them.

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388 Cf 2 Cor 3:18.
389 Cf 1 Cor 13:12.
390 Cf Rev 14:13.
391 Rom 14:8
392 Cf Horace *Odes* 3.3.7–8.

A Hebrew scholar[393] has suggested that at this point a different word for substance is being used from the one found in a previous verse, although in both cases the Septuagint gives the translation ὑπόστασις. But the person who made this suggestion gave no explanation for this distinction. In Latin the word *substantia* is used to mean 'property,' while the Greeks call it οὐσίαν; this is the word used by St Luke in chapter 15 when he recounts the Lord's parable of the prodigal son who squandered his share of the wealth given to him by his father; perhaps the Hebrew word here signifies something of this kind.

Listen, those of you who are tormented by great anxieties, and you will be told where you can safely deposit your possessions. Idythun has revealed the safest place and the most reliable protection; no one who has deposited his wealth with the Lord will complain that he is poor or worthless or ruined. He alone is everything to us – wealth, strength, beauty, reputation, wisdom, and justice – provided that we put all our hope in him. People who have such things are generally said to be happy, but Christ calls those truly happy whose reward is plentiful in heaven.[394] And so, my dear friends, let our hearts be where our treasure is,[395] so that we too may be of some substance in him who alone truly exists, for in ourselves we are nothing; let us who are poor in ourselves be rich in him. He who gave us his only Son[396] will undoubtedly also grant us everything else.[397] Consider how much good is done to us by the storms of suffering which completely engulf man. If they afflict him at every turn and never allow his mind any peace, they drive him to the point where he loses confidence in himself and in all outward things and puts all his trust in the Lord, building his house not on sand but on the solid rock which is Christ Jesus.[398] Anyone who takes his stand here cannot be cast down, even if the whole force of the winds and all the violence of the waves were to rise up against him. If his property is stolen, he says to the Lord: 'My substance is with you'; if he is deprived of high office, he says: 'My honour is Christ'; if he is humiliated in men's eyes for the sake of justice, he rejoices because his name is written

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393 Paul of Burgos in the *Additiones* to Nicolas of Lyra *Biblia cum glossa ordinaria* III (1498–1502) f 142v
394 Matt 5:12
395 Cf Matt 6:21.
396 Cf John 3:16.
397 Cf Rom 8:32.
398 Cf Matt 7:24–6; 1 Pet 2:6–8.

in heaven;[399] if someone tries to kill him, he says calmly: 'Even if I were to undergo one thousand deaths and if I were cast into hell, yet my substance would be with you who promised your disciples that not a hair on their heads would be destroyed.'[400]

Look what great leaps he has made, he who has leaped right up to this mountain from which he surveys the whole of creation and who has placed all his hopes of happiness in God alone. Is he then calm now? Is there anything which troubles him? He is still oppressed by his mortal body and burdened by his sins which prevent him flying up to that perfect rest which he can see before him only with the eyes of faith; he understands that outward sufferings are inflicted on man because of his sins and that they are administered as medicines by a kind doctor; he realizes that whatever Satan devises against us, using wicked men as his instruments, is done with the permission of a loving Father who punishes us in this life so that, reformed and purified, we might be admitted into his everlasting home. And so our Idythun cries out: 'Deliver me from all my transgressions. You have made me an object of scorn to the fool.' He does not say: 'Deliver me, O Lord, from an evil man,' but 'from all my transgressions.' He fears all sin because it separates him from God. There are some people who detest some of their faults but indulge others even though these may be far more serious: they abhor lust or drunkenness but give free rein to their greed, pride, or envy, calling the first 'providence,' the second 'strength of mind,' the third 'justice,' and so on. But anyone who sincerely loves that highest good which is the precious pearl of the gospel,[401] hates anything which in any way separates him from it. Now Idythun does not beg to be released from his sufferings for they act as a medicine if they are administered because of his wrongdoings or as a crown if they are sent to test him; he does, however, long to be freed from all his transgressions. He has already to a large extent been purified and now he has touched upon the very source of his misfortunes, for it is from sin that all the troubles of this life flow. If you suffer what you deserve, endure patiently the medicine of Christ in the hope of gaining health; if you do not deserve to suffer as you do, you must patiently await the crown of victory. But is there anyone who does not deserve it? The loss of one's property is painful but it is the cure for greed; the loss of a child is distressing, but you put your children before God; the loss of a dear wife causes much grief, but you loved her too much. Illness causes

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399 Cf Luke 10:20.
400 Cf Luke 21:18.
401 Cf Matt 13:46.

intense suffering, but the pleasures of the flesh were too attractive. A bad reputation is hard to bear, but you were too keen to win the praise of others. 'You have made me an object of scorn to the fool.' Some people's faults are concealed beneath a semblance of virtue, but an abscess which does not burst is more dangerous. David's sin lay hidden in this way but the Lord wished to cure him and exposed the sin so that it might be removed by being acknowledged. See how Idythun cries out: 'Deliver me from all my transgressions.' When David was rebuked, he said: 'I have sinned against the Lord';[402] do you then say: 'Why has this disaster befallen me? I do not deserve it'? Suffering often has the same effect on us as the prophet Nathan had on David. Whenever we are chastised by suffering, we should imitate David and say: 'I have sinned against the Lord.' And if you find yourself castigated by the insults of wicked people, you should imitate David and say: 'The Lord has told them to abuse me.'[403] It is true that they who do this are afflicted with the vice of insolence but the Lord makes use of their vice to chastise his servants. It is a good sign, a sign that he does not want you to perish.

'You have made me an object of scorn to the fool.' The man who was earlier referred to as a sinner is here called a fool; in another psalm it is said of him: 'The fool has said in his heart, there is no God.'[404] It is not for pious people to abuse the repentant sinner if he is beginning to come to his senses; rather they should pity him and assist him. You are like the Pharisee if you say, 'like this tax-collector.'[405] None are more abusive in their attacks on the faults of others than those who are themselves prone to even more serious vices. Shimei was this type of person;[406] he was a relative of the proud Saul and he inherited Saul's hatred of David. David went into exile and went weeping, with bare feet and head uncovered, driven out of his kingdom and exposed to death. When he had been cast down in this way, he was savagely insulted by Shimei who was truly a fool. Amidst such great tribulations it was hard to endure mockery from this most aggressive man who also threw earth and stones at David from the hill above. And yet the insults were a good thing because they reconciled David to the Lord's mercy. He bore them patiently because he knew the Lord was inflicting them out of pity. What happened then? This terrible suffering was followed by a fortunate victory and the restoration of royal authority.

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402 2 Kings/2 Sam 12:13
403 2 Kings/2 Sam 16:10
404 Ps 13/14:1
405 Luke 18:11
406 2 Kings/2 Sam 16:5–8.

Similarly, too, our Lord, the true David, was made an object of scorn to the fool when he was told: 'You are a Samaritan and you have a demon,'[407] when he was mocked with the words, 'Hail, King of the Jews';[408] and when they said to him: 'Ah, he would destroy the temple of God, let him now get down from the cross,'[409] and so on. The wicked are fools to insult those whom the hand of God is chastising, as if they had already been destroyed and it was all over for them; they take the treatment of the disease to be something intended to destroy. But I do not know anything more distressing to noble hearts than this kind of mockery, especially when not Shimei alone, but the sound of an angry mob assaults their ears on every side and when reputation, 'as retentive of whatever is false or wicked as she is ready to tell what is true,' is attacked by six thousand tongues.[410]

However, amidst all this he whose substance is in the Lord's hands does not despair, realizing that it is the Lord who has made him an object of scorn to the fool. He acknowledges that 'You have made me an object of scorn to the fool'; these are the words not of someone complaining, but of one who admits the doctor's treatment. Otherwise, were he to say this in a rebellious tone of voice, the Lord could reply: 'No, you have made yourself an object of scorn to the fool, by allowing sin to corrupt you and committing offences which rightly bring you disgrace. If your lack of self-control had not led you to contract this disease, there would be no need for treatment. I have subjected you to the insults of fools because you made yourself vulnerable to the abuse and insults of fools. What is more insane than to esteem the creature more highly than the creator and to lose eternal blessings for the sake of short-lived ones which will soon vanish? Is there anything more disgraceful than to abandon Christ and become the slave of Satan? Since you refused to feel shame for your sins before God, I caused you to feel shame before men, whether you liked it or not, in the hope that your suffering might make you come to your senses. You were not ashamed to sin; are you ashamed to be cured? And since you refused to abandon your sin when you were rebuked by wise people in a friendly manner, I saw to it that the hostile reproaches of foolish men should rouse you to repentance.' Anyone who murmurs angrily against God in times of trouble deserves to hear such things. To be sure, this is how wicked people behave, but what about the just man? He glorifies God,

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407 John 8:48
408 Mark 15:18
409 Mark 15:29–30
410 Virgil *Aeneid* 4.188: Erasmus seems to be applying this verse to *fama* in its meaning of 'reputation' rather than of 'rumour' as in the original context.

acknowledges his sins, speaks openly of God's justice, and takes refuge in his mercy.

Some people take ἄφρονι, the fool, to refer to Satan, the lord of all fools. He was the first to abandon his creator and turn from God who was his salvation. He caused the downfall of the human race and has never ceased to use his instruments to make trouble for the godly. And certainly it does refer to Satan to the extent that when he humiliates those very people whom he persuades to sin, by bringing on them the disgrace of sin, then he is playing the part of the devil, in other words, the calumniator, the betrayer, and slanderer.[411] For this is that accuser of our brothers who accused them day and night before our God.[412] If he can lure someone to destruction, he rejoices insolently and exults in triumph over his victim. But the virtuous do not fear this slanderer for they know that they have a good advocate with the Father,[413] and they follow Paul in saying: 'If Christ is for us, who is against us? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?'[414] This is the fool who without provocation brought false accusations against Job before God. This is he who used an abusive and wicked wife to insult a man who was in trouble but not in despair; he also used a woman to rebuke Tobias. This is he who used Shimei to insult David, used his wife Michal to provoke him, and used the Pharisees and Scribes to revile Christ. This is the one who every day uses slanderous men to insult virtuous people, whether they are recovering from their faults and becoming repentant or once they have rejected the world and now persevere in righteous behaviour: for both states appear to be a kind of madness to those who are not wise with the things of God. Such people think that those are wise who humble themselves before a human king so as to gain favour with him; but they consider insane those who are submissive to God in the hope that he might be well disposed towards them rather than angry.

The blessed Jerome gives the reading: 'Do not make me an object of scorn to the fool.' This is consistent with what is written in the previous psalm: 'Let my enemies never rejoice over me,'[415] and I am not the only one to have suggested that it is characteristic of prophetic speech for the past tense to be used for the future and vice versa.

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411 See n258 above.
412 Rev 12:10
413 Cf 1 John 2:1.
414 Rom 8:31, 33
415 Ps 37:17/38:16

If the just man is humiliated by the wicked in this life, he endures it patiently provided that he is not made to feel ashamed at the Last Judgment, for Satan will be there and will reproach him with those offences which he did not obliterate by means of repentance in this life. For then they whose sins have been covered will be blessed for that traitor will have nothing to reproach them with.[416] To prevent Satan from reproaching him the just man prays that he may be absolved from all his sins or transgressions in this life. Those who in this life conceal their faults from God and the priest, who is God's representative, will feel ashamed in the next life when confronted by the angels of God and when all their disgraceful deeds are brought to light. On the other hand, anyone who reveals his offences to God and to God's representative in this life will have his sins hidden from the wicked slanderer.

It would not be absurd if someone were to interpret this as referring to each person's evil genius which rejoices whenever a man lapses into sin; and when it perceives that God is delivering the man up to many different misfortunes, it hopes that he has been abandoned and that the magnitude of his sufferings will lead him to despair and to rebel against God. And so the just man prays that he will not suffer this disgrace and that he will not give his enemy occasion to exult and insult him (for it is harder for a man to bear this than the misfortune itself).

The fool could also be understood to be a Jew or Gentile who is ignorant of the divine dispensation and therefore gives free rein to his irreverence when he sees Christians behaving in a disgraceful manner, and he says: 'These are the people who curse us for being irreligious but they lead more wicked lives than we do.' On the other hand, if they see Christians being crushed beneath the most terrible misfortunes, they mock them by saying: 'Their God is certainly treating them well. They have their reward for their devotion.' As these insults revert to God, the just man prays that his sufferings will be taken away or alleviated, so that the fool will be deprived of the opportunity for reproaching him with them. This, in my opinion at any rate, is what Paul prayed for when he entreated the Lord three times that the spirit of Satan should leave him,[417] fearing that some people might be put off and alienated from the gospel if its apostle were to be harassed by so many difficulties and so often beaten, stoned, banished, shipwrecked,[418] and finally reduced to such a

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416 Rom 4:7
417 2 Cor 12:8
418 2 Cor 11:25

state of poverty that he was forced to earn his living by sewing skins together.

But what is Idythun doing in the meantime, while Satan employs slanderous men to mock him on every side and assails him, not with stones and earth but with every kind of insult? He speaks to God whom he knows to be merciful, and he is silent before the man, knowing who it is who speaks through him and by whose permission he speaks. He confesses to God for he knows that God can be moved by entreaty and that God is ready to forgive and does not reproach one with something which he has already forgiven. Idythun is silent before the fool lest he should become like him and come away defeated twice over – if, after being defeated once in the struggle with temptation and having fallen into sin, he should now be overcome in a more ignominious way, hurling insults in retaliation for insults; he keeps quiet to stop himself defending his misfortunes shamelessly or boasting of his blessings arrogantly and sanctimoniously. The fact is that anyone who mutters angrily in temptation is muttering against God, not against man, and anyone who uses abuse to get the better of a slanderer is himself being worsted by the one who uses the slanderer to make his attacks. You can defeat him if you defeat yourself. You can win by patience but if you struggle you will be defeated. Therefore Idythun says: 'I was dumb and I did not open my mouth, since you have done it.' The repetition of the same meaning indicates that his silence is a stubborn one. To be dumb is more emphatic than to be silent, and not to open one's mouth is more than to be dumb. It is often the case that an insult hovers on a person's tongue but does not spring forth, while the sighs and exclamations show that his anger has been provoked. But so far is Idythun from repaying the insults that he does not even open his lips to speak: not because this is what the slanderer deserves, but because the just man recognizes that it is the hand of the Lord lashing him, not so as to destroy him but to free him from his sins. And so he acknowledges in silence both his own faults and the Lord's judgment. As it is the Lord who judges us, so it is he who chastises us to prevent us from being condemned together with this world.[419] If someone patiently submits to the knife as the doctor cuts him open or cauterizes him to remove some physical disorder, is it not impudent of him to refuse to submit to God's hand when it brings spiritual health?

And so, 'I was dumb, since you have done it.' It is with your permission that the slanderer strikes my mouth just as it was with your per-

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419 1 Cor 11:32

mission that Satan persecuted the blessed Job. You must understand why Satan conceals himself in an instrument. We can take an analogy from bullfighting:[420] when the bull first sees the machine showing signs of hostile activity, he leaps back in fear as it threatens him with its horns and gaping mouth; but he soon realizes that the machine is being made to move by men hidden inside, so he attempts to attack them, butting the sides of the machine. A dumb animal can perceive this and yet a man cannot understand that a slanderous person is Satan's machine and his instrument. You should be angry with him, not with the man; it is against him that you must plan your revenge. But the best way for you to get your own back, and what causes him most pain, is for you to admit your guilt and patiently submit to the hand of the Lord. The Lord's treatment of you may be painful for a while but it is not harmful; the scourge may torment you, but you must endure it for your health's sake.

At this point St Augustine has, 'because you have made me,'[421] but he was misled by a textual error. This reading can also, however, have a pious meaning, for it would be absurd if a creature were to resist his creator, kicking against the pricks, so to speak. Whatever misfortune befalls a man, it is safer for him to keep silent and to say to himself, in the words of David and Eli: 'He is the Lord, he is the creator, he is the redeemer, let him do with me whatever is good in his eyes.' He says to the Lord: 'You are responsible for this temptation but you considered that the creature of mud was worthy to have reason and in your mercy you gave me not only the temptation but also the strength to bear it. When your hand has justly inflicted these wounds on me because of my sins, in your mercy you deign to remove your hand, lest I should collapse while you are chastising.' The same hand both inflicts the wound and brings help to the servant.

'Because you have done it': his phrase can apply to either action. 'You alone can remove the wound because you alone can inflict it.' Or, 'I remained dumb during the period of temptation because I knew that these things had been inflicted by you to whom no one can say, "Why do you do this?"'

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420 In the course of his Italian travels (1506–9) Erasmus witnessed bullfights in Rome (Allen Ep 3032:417–31) and in Siena (*Supputatio* LB IX 516–517A), though he was not enthusiastic about them. This reference alludes to the *Caccia dei Tori*, an annual carnival in Siena which made use of *machinae*, cars constructed with a wooden frame covered by wickerwork and leather which protected the men who propelled the vehicles around the arena. Each bore on its front a mechanical beast's head, representative of one of the *contrade* or districts of the city, which could be operated by pulleys to taunt the bull.

421 Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 38* 16 PL 36 426

Although there are two powers who cause pain, namely God and Satan, it is only to God that the words 'since you have done it' are addressed; only to him are the words 'Remove your blows from me' spoken. In the same way Satan harassed Job, and yet it was to God that Job said: 'Take from me your rod and let not fear of him terrify me'; 'Withdraw your hand far from me and let not fear of you terrify me'; and 'Because your arrows are in me.'[422] Both God and Satan use the whip but the one does so as a judge, the other does so in order to inflict severe pain; the one uses it to correct or so as to award a crown of victory, the other uses it to destroy. For this God is given thanks but Satan is cursed. Similarly, when a defendant is sentenced to death by the judge, he does not get angry or throw himself on the mercy of the executioner, but appeals to the judge who has the authority to reduce the penalty. The executioner acts in accordance with the rules and is not in a position to increase or lessen the punishment.

Similarly, those who have set their hopes firmly in Christ are not frightened by Satan's cruelty, for although he is constantly intent on destroying a man, he cannot harm even a single hair without God's consent. It should be noted, too, that Idythun attributes these blows to God when he says: 'Remove your blows from me'; but when he is speaking of his sins he says, 'Deliver me from all my transgressions.' Deadly are the blows which a man inflicts on himself, while the blows inflicted on man by God are restorative. The medicine is unpleasant but effective; it distresses man who, in his weakness, cries out amidst his sufferings: 'Since you have done it, remove your blows from me.'

The correct order is preserved here: first he cries: 'Deliver me from all my transgressions,' and then 'Remove your blows from me.' But the common crowd puts them the other way round; they all call out: 'Save us from disease, hunger, war, floods, lightning, O Lord,' but they ought first to cry: 'Save us from excess, from immorality, ambition, anger, hatred, and all our other faults,' if indeed it is the case that the evils which men bring on themselves are the cause of those misfortunes which God inflicts on them. Otherwise what else should they pray for – they who persist in their sins and who demand to be freed from external misfortunes – than that God should allow them to indulge their vices undisturbed for a long time? Do you wish your body to be rid of a disease although you are content to harbour in your soul so many sources of destruction which are far more deadly? You try to avert hunger by prayer, although you yourself continually cause your

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422 Job 9:34, 13:21, 6:4

neighbour to go hungry because of monopolies, fraud, and robbery. You pray for a more plentiful harvest but if you ever get one, it certainly does not make you any more generous towards your needy brother, but rather more greedy. You do not want to lose your property in war but every day you behave like an enemy to your neighbour. You fear that a flood may harm your fields when in fact you should rather dread that flood which destroys souls when they are inundated with vices. Do you fear the lightning which can strike a man's body as it flashes from the clouds, when you should rather fear the thunderbolt which hurls both the body and soul into hell?[423] You must ask the Lord for both things, for just as he alone pardons sins, so he alone releases us from external suffering when he so wishes. But first you must make sure that you get rid of what you have done and then beseech the Lord to take away or alleviate what he has brought about. Bear in mind the words of the blessed Job: 'Happy is the man whom the Lord rebukes.'[424] Do not, then, find fault with the Lord for rebuking you for he applies the remedy to the wound as well as inflicting it, and although he wounds, his hands will also heal. It is he who speaks through Isaiah, saying: 'I am the Lord and no other, forming the light and creating the darkness, making peace and creating misfortune. I am the Lord doing all these things.'[425] Similarly in Ezekiel he says: 'And you may know I am the Lord dealing the blow.'[426] You must understand who is inflicting the wound so that you may know where to seek a cure and turn to the Lord for help, for according to the words of Hosea: 'He began and he will make us healthy; he will strike us and also heal us; he will bring us back to life after two days.'[427]

And so not only does he heal those who are wounded but he also calls those who have been killed back to life; and as it says in the song of Hannah: 'The Lord kills and gives life; he takes us down into the underworld and brings us back.'[427] Surgeons refuse to touch some wounds because they say they cannot be healed, but what danger is there when he who inflicts the wound can revive even a dead man? 'For I have already grown weak by the strength (or by the rod) of your hand.' Those who are operated upon by a surgeon fear that the knife may go in deeper than it should; is it sur-

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423 Cf Matt 10:28.
424 Job 5:17
425 Isa 45:6–7
426 Ezek 7:9
427 Hos 6:2–3/6:1–2
427 1 Kings/1 Sam 2:6

prising, then, if man who is so weak should dread that omnipotent hand of God as it makes an incision?

But why has he become disheartened when a little earlier he said: 'And now what is my expectation if not the Lord? And my substance is with you.' Has he suddenly relapsed into despair after this strong expression of hope? Far from it. Here it is the flesh speaking, the flesh which is weak, not the spirit which is willing.[429] He says that he has become weak – he who is in danger of becoming weak and had already become disheartened as far as he himself was concerned. Is it surprising if someone who is not completely free from sin should speak like this in a time of trial, when the Lord himself before his death, in weariness and fear of his impending suffering, sweated blood and prayed on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'[430] The Lord sometimes allows his disciples to become disheartened to the point where they acknowledge their weakness and abandon their self-confident attitudes. This is what happened to Peter when he denied the Lord three times; he fell but as a result he rose again stronger and also more cautious.

The hand of a tyrant is not strong for it has power only to kill the body;[431] strong is the hand which strikes, when it so wishes, in such a way that it hurls both body and soul down into hell; and there is no one who can snatch them from his hand. Would not anyone who has a guilty conscience fear that hand when it is stretched out to strike, would he not grow weak with fear? And who is so free from sin that he can bear God's judgment? Paul felt the force of this hand when he asked the Lord three times to remove the whip of Satan.[432] A person who is cut open cries out: 'Stop, that's enough. I cannot bear it,' but the physician nevertheless continues his task until he has finished: he knows that these are the words of human weakness but that man's reason desires health. He listens sympathetically to what the man says but he does what the spirit wishes. It is good for a man to be made weak by the strength of God's hand, for it means that he ceases to rely on his own powers and submits completely to the will of God, acknowledging that he is at fault, praying to escape a severe sentence, and begging for mercy. The flesh trembles but the spirit does not despair altogether, knowing how skilful is the one who cuts and cauterizes. Sometimes he inflicts dreadful wounds, but his hand does not falter; it is sure

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429 Cf Matt 26:41.
430 Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34
431 Cf Matt 10:28.
432 2 Cor 12:8

and if it causes quite serious wounds, it also confers more grace and has remedies at hand. A person who strives to ward off disaster by means of human resources or ideas is not made weak by the strength of God's hand and neither is someone who either denies his guilt or makes excuses for it. But this just man is aware that, although misfortunes are inflicted by men, they do originate from God, and he abandons confidence in his own capabilities and worthiness; instead he entrusts himself wholly to the right hand on high, in whose sight no one can seem righteous, especially as he is well aware that in this situation God is inflicting blows not in order to destroy him but to cure him. And so he adds: 'You have chastened man in rebukes because of his wickedness.' (The phrase 'in rebukes' is used instead of 'by means of rebukes' in accordance with a Hebrew idiom.) He acknowledges the justice of God who punishes a man justly, but at the same time he recognizes God's mercy because he uses misfortunes which only last for a limited time to punish people in this life, so that he need not inflict the everlasting punishment of hell's torments. The medicine is unpleasant but he knows that the disease is harder to bear. The force of God's hand made him weak when he compared what he deserved with God's justice, but he recovers his strength when he reflects how great is God's mercy, in that God should be content to inflict trivial suffering in this life, suffering which will not last long, instead of that hell which his deeds deserve. Consequently he did not say ἐκόλασας 'you have punished' but ἐπαίδευσας, in other words, 'you have chastened me in order to teach me.'

As he was forgetful of you while things were going well, he lapsed into decadent habits, and having grown insensitive he becomes recalcitrant, believing himself to be of some importance. Therefore 'you have caused his soul to dissolve like a spider's web' or like a moth. He deserves to waste away like this to make him repent, he who flourished wickedly, immersed in pleasures. He was a lion when he used his power and wealth cruelly to oppress the poor; he was a horse, enslaved to lust and adultery and whinnying after every woman; he was a pig in his self-indulgent lifestyle, for his wickedness was, as it were, caused by his fat; he was a peacock, swelling with false pride, believing himself to be of great importance, although he is in fact a nobody.[433]

As soon as the strong hand of the Lord has touched him, however, he is transformed from a lion, a horse, a pig, or a peacock into a spider or a moth (for this passage allows both readings). There is nothing more

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433 For the depiction of the seven deadly sins in terms of the characteristics of certain animals, see Morton Bloomfield *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan 1952).

bloodless than a spider, nothing more delicate or more vulnerable or likely to cause decay. It weaves elaborate webs but they are fragile; it hunts, but only flies and even smaller creatures. There is nothing more worthless than the larva of a moth: it disintegrates in its own mould and causes whatever it touches to decay. Those who have studied the nature of things assert that those who come into contact with a spider's poison gradually waste away, affected by a sort of lingering torpor (for not all poisons have the same effect). Poets, who can give an apposite epithet to anything, call the spider 'dry' – 'the dry spider climbs down with its whole web.'[434]

Even the web itself has the power to dry things up and so it is applied to wounds to staunch the flow of blood. These same poets have also attached a story to their description of this creature:[435] they say that once upon a time there was a girl who was a very talented weaver but she was so proud of her skill that in comparison she despised even Pallas Athene (for according to the poets the goddesses also weave). As a result, a contest took place, but Pallas could not endure the girl's arrogance; she destroyed her work and struck Arachne (for that was the young girl's name) with a shuttle. Arachne hanged herself, but Pallas then sprinkled her with the juice of Hecate's herb. This is believed to be the same thing as aconite which is compounded in such a way that over a long period it gradually causes a man to waste away: it takes at least two years to kill someone but the longer he lives, the more wretched he becomes. This is how Arachne lived, but to her distress she was turned into a spider with a very tiny head, a swollen belly, very nimble feet and so delicate that you could destroy it instantly by pressing it lightly with your finger, according to St Augustine.[436]

When man, induced by Satan, began to assume equality with God, he was subjected to such misery that he became tormented by constant worries about things of no importance. This is why the common run of men put their faith in worthless things, say foolish things, and weave spiders' webs,[437] and their trust is like a spider's web.[438] The spider produces its threads out of its own belly and anything which man produces by his own efforts is no better than a spider's web, no matter how impressive it may seem – but it only seems so to people who are themselves mere spiders. One man constructs royal palaces, another annexes one dominion after another; one man hunts for a wife with a very large dowry, another acquires one

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434 The author of this line is unknown.
435 Cf Ovid *Metamorphoses* 6.129–45.
436 Cf Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 38* PL 36 427.
437 *Adagia* I iv 47: *Aranearum telas texere*
438 Job 8:14

bishopric after another, while someone else struggles to obtain the triple crown. Ordinary people are impressed by this but in fact all these things are nothing other than spiders' webs; a light breeze sent by God can shatter them all. What has become of the pyramids of Memphis? Where are the triumphal monuments and arches? What has become of those enormous statues like the Colossus of Rhodes? Where are the rest of those monuments on which kings expended great effort and expense, in the hope that they would bring them eternal fame? What were they constructing but spiders' webs?[439] The products of their labour did not benefit them and their efforts were unsuccessful; nothing has any substance except what the spirit of Christ constructs in us.

There is nothing, however, to prevent this passage from being applied to each person's particular faults, amidst which a man continues to waste away forever unless through God's mercy he is transformed into a new creature – in other words, unless he is turned from an elephant into a spider and from a spider into an eagle which, its youth restored, flies up towards the eternal. This is that divine metamorphosis which produces a new creature in Christ and transforms the old Adam into the new.[440] In the same way, when nature creates a brightly coloured butterfly out of an ugly caterpillar, it causes the old creature to disintegrate and almost destroys it so that the new and vigorous winged creature can emerge. But the same power is responsible for creating and recreating; only he who formed man is able to transform him. Man was created out of clay so that, mindful of his origin, he would not become self-confident to the point of arrogance, for then he would be told: 'Why are you proud, you who are earth and ashes?' But man was deaf to this and in its pride the clay rebelled against the potter, the mud against the creator; man's original status was lost and now the hand of the Lord was needed once more to restore what had fallen into decay. According to the law of nature nothing new can be created from something unless what existed first has been destroyed: but whatever is destroyed, is destroyed by its opposite. And so, when the soul is weakened by suffering, it becomes a spider, from a spider it is transformed into a spotless lamb, and from a lamb into an eagle.

The reading which we give – 'his soul' – is translated by some people[441] as 'his precious thing' or 'his desirable thing.' In the same way it is common

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439 Cf Isa 59:5.

440 1 Cor 15:45

441 Erasmus is thinking of Symmachus, whose Greek translation of the Bible is one of the versions included in Origen's edition of the Old Testament known as the *Hexapla*; see also n333 above.

usage in Latin to call anything which is particularly dear to someone his soul; in comedy the lover says: 'Be my soul, for I am yours.'[442] Nothing is dearer to a man than his soul, that is, his life, and if this is in danger no one hesitates to save it at the loss of all else. And so, although the thought of death is bitter to someone who lives in luxury, the hand of the Lord makes life, which man considers to be the most delightful thing, so bitter that the person begins to long for death, oppressed by the severity of his afflictions; he has lost the things which were his when he led a life of luxury and he has been driven from the things in which he found comfort. Wealth turns to poverty, influence into ignominy, kindness into hatred, and honour into disgrace; pleasure becomes torment, beauty ugliness; health turns into pitiable sickness and peace of mind into anxiety. The greater the pleasure he used to derive from these attractive things, the more intense is the torment caused by their opposites. For it is difficult to relinquish what was very precious to one, and a person who has lost everything that he believed to be the source of his happiness becomes sad, withers, and wastes away when he realizes that the deceptive appearance of things deluded him and deprived him of things which were truly good; he is not allowed to enjoy the things which seem good or to gain those things which are truly good. He has been deprived of what was delightful – it has vanished because it has no substance – and what was neglected is out of reach. In the presence of all the man wastes away, disintegrating completely, and is utterly destroyed, unless the mercy of the Lord comes to his assistance. Worldly grief brings death,[443] but those who submit to the hand of the Lord patiently and who endure sadness in accordance with God's will do so for their own good. The flesh suffers and withers for a time so that it may become a healthy spirit on the day of the Lord, the day which has no evening. A skilful physician first drains and empties the body of the sick man so that, once it has been purged, it can flourish with renewed vigour. But some people, ignorant of medical science, protest: 'What are you doing, doctor? Are you killing your patient?' What would a skilful and reliable physician reply to this? 'Let me be. My patient is growing thin now so that he may soon put on weight with happier results. My skills could not help him while he was swollen with harmful fluids. He may find the treatment hard to bear at the moment but soon he will be pleased to have undergone it.' Of those who pine away (in man's sense of the term), some go mad, while others resort to the noose or to poison and they will die twice over; but those who acknowl-

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442 Terence *The Eunuch* 196
443 2 Cor 7:10

edge the hand of the Lord resign themselves to wasting away in tears, in fasting, in vigils, and in fear of hell because they trust that this will result in health and that whatever they have lost will be paid back to them at great interest. Satan left the blessed Job with nothing, but the Lord restored everything to him twice over. And even if he had not restored what had been taken away, a clear conscience and a joyful spirit are alone better than all this world's possessions and more delightful than all the world's pleasures.

Man ought therefore to commit himself with all confidence to the hand of God who chastises him. God is his father and does not inflict more blows than are necessary. God is a wise and omnipotent doctor and will not inflict wounds which cause death. Even if he drives the knife in quite deeply, he does not do so with the intention of killing but in order to cure the patient more quickly. Even if he does kill, by killing he restores to life. Thus he cast the persecuting Paul down so that he might rise up as a preacher; he threw the wolf to the ground that he might rise again as a lamb. Those who have mortified their desires and who live for Christ are fortunate in their death.

The Lord said that those who mourn are blessed because comfort awaits them,[444] but they will not find perfect consolation in this life where one temptation follows another just as the waves of the sea fall one upon another. So not all who mourn are blessed, for the human condition is in every respect full of tears and sorrow. Consider also those people who are thought to be fortunate – even they have every reason to lament. However, while all men grieve, they alone are blessed who grieve to the point of repentance, who grieve for justice, who grieve in their desire for heavenly things. For in the case of such people, even the misfortunes common to all men bring them a gain in piety. The fact that all mortals share this condition makes the burden of suffering easier to bear. If you refuse to be cast down by God when he rebukes you, you will still be cast down because you are a human being. You should therefore, by enduring patiently what must necessarily happen, turn it into an opportunity for virtue.

As Idythun leaps now here, now there, he turns his gaze from his own personal troubles to the common lot of mankind and says: 'Surely every man's agitation is illusory,' or 'Every man is an illusion.' Anyone who is only a man is pitifully subject to anxieties and tries by various means to escape anything troublesome; he will do anything to make his life pleasant

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444 Cf Matt 5:5.

and peaceful, forgetting that this life is a journey through a vale of tears.[445] But his agitation is useless for he strives to avoid what cannot be avoided in this life and seeks what cannot be found in this life. He tries to avoid any trouble but no aspect of human life is free from it; he tries to find perfect peace which is denied to man in this life. Who does not consider the man insane who endeavours to keep dry when swimming in the sea? or the man who uses a hook to fish in the air and tries to catch birds in the sea?

To confirm the view expressed in this verse, anyone whose mind has reached the same heights as Idythun shouts 'Selah,' in other words, 'For ever.' He does not cry 'Amen' because it is not a matter of hope but of inevitable truth. All flesh is always grass and all its splendour is as the flower of the field;[446] the flesh withers even against its will, but it is fortunate for it that it does wither for it will soon be made to flourish again by the spirit of Christ. The grain of wheat cannot ripen unless it first rots in the earth.[447] One has in fact come quite a long way in one's progress towards salvation once one understands, realizes, and sincerely declares that a man, however great, is nothing but emptiness and that all flesh is nothing but grass even when it is in its prime and at the height of its beauty. Anyone who does not realize this because he does not acknowledge that he is in distress does not cry out for mercy. Idythun does perceive it and he therefore cries out: 'Hear my words, O Lord, and heed my cries; do not be deaf to my tears.' The prophet seems to be saying the same thing three times when he urges us, by means of this repetition, to be fervent and insistent in our prayers. When he prays he first wishes to be heard; he then cries out, begging to be heeded (we can properly be said to heed what impinges on our hearing from a great distance; but the greatest distance is that between this earth, which we tread, and the throne of God; and yet from those heights the Lord heeds the prayers of the lowly who call to him although their cry is not the sound produced in the body by a powerful breath, but an ardent emotion.) Thirdly he mentions tears, for these, too, have a voice of their own even when the tongue is silent. All the same, it may seem that the phrase: 'Do not be deaf to my tears' is not suitably expressed, for tears can be seen with the eyes rather than heard with the ears. He could have said: 'Look at my tears,' but the strangeness of the figurative phrase warns us that there is some mystical significance to the expression 'do not be deaf to my tears.' It is often the case among

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445 Cf Ps 83:7/84:6.
446 Isa 40:6
447 John 12:24

men that people who cannot be moved by any entreaty are softened by silent tears and become merciful. So importunate a thing is a tear – indeed, there is no sound more effective than that of tears, when sobs interrupt one's speech. It does however make a difference to whom the flowing tears make their appeal. There is no help to be gained from men and that is why the blessed Job says: 'My friends are talkative, my eye flows with tears to God.'[448] Anyone who prays is admitting his poverty; he who calls out is in the grip of great need, but he who weeps is making an assault. Moreover, Ecclesiasticus bears witness to the fact that his tears and sighs have a voice of their own when he says: 'The Lord will not scorn the prayers of the people nor of the widow if she pours forth the speech of her groaning. Do not the widow's tears run right down her cheeks, and does she not cry out over the one who causes them? For they run down from the cheeks as far as heaven and when the Lord heeds them he will not be pleased by them.'[449] And so there is nothing more silent than tears but also nothing more clamorous; there is nothing weaker than tears but also nothing more violent.

In the first instance the word given is προσευχή, which is used of someone who desires; in the second instance the word is δέησις, which is used of a suppliant and a person in need; thirdly, we find 'tears.' Desire impels us to pray, need urges us to cry out, while tears cause us to get what we want by force. Where there is desire there is no pretence; where there is a cry there is no respite; where there are tears, there violence is in some sense brought to bear on God's mercy. By her insistent cries the woman of Canaan triumphed and she was told: 'O woman, great is your faith; may it be done for you as you desire.'[450] Mary Magdalene said nothing but the Lord was not deaf to her tears and she was told: 'Your sins are forgiven.'[451]

Some people read 'do not be silent' instead of 'do not be deaf':[452] different words are being used to express the same meaning, for the person who remains silent when faced with the tears of someone who assaults him with weeping seems not to hear. The grammarians recognize a type of synecdoche when one thing is understood from another, as when someone seized by fear is said to have turned pale or when someone who is embarrassed is said to blush.

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448 Job 16:21/20
449 Cf Ecclus 35:17–18; Lam 1:2.
450 Matt 15:28
451 Luke 7:48
452 Cf Origen *Hexapla* PG 16 757.

If you were not deaf to my tears, O Lord, I would hear your voice. What voice? That which the fortunate sinner heard, saying 'your sins are forgiven,'[453] the voice of mercy. Your spirit cries out in my heart, 'Abba, Father.'[454] He wants to be heeded but it is worthwhile noting what names he uses in committing himself to God's care, so that he might be thought worthy to be heard by God. He says: 'since I am a stranger and a sojourner in your eyes, like all my fathers.' What is there here to recommend him as he begs for mercy? Why does he not instead mention the victims he has sacrificed, the fact that he has given the poor a tenth part of his wealth, the sleepless nights spent in prayer, the fact that he has slept on the bare ground and fasted, and his other good deeds? If he were to do this, he would now be contradicting himself for he has twice declared in this psalm that all men are worthless. You will prevail upon the Lord more quickly if you tell him of all your problems rather than your merits. If someone can really sincerely say to God: 'I am a stranger and a sojourner in your eyes,' then he has made good progress on the road to virtue, for he understands that in this life he has no permanent home and that he is seeking one where he can live in the future; but in passing he makes use of this world as if he were not using it.[455] He does not store up his treasure here but lays aside all heavy baggage and then hastens on through thick and thin to that heavenly Jerusalem.

In fact all men, whether they recognize it or not, are strangers and sojourners, but in the eyes of the Lord not all are sojourners.[456] Similarly, the phrases 'to be with the Lord' and 'to travel away from the Lord' appear to contradict each other and in fact they would do so if it were not for the fact that human nature is twofold: those who are connected to the earth by their bodies but have their hearts in heaven are truly sojourners and strangers before God; that is where their home is and in their prayers they sigh with longing for that place, while the outer part of man cleaves to this world. The most blessed Paul was a sojourner of this kind, as is clear from what he wrote to the Corinthians: 'The things that are seen are transient; the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if this tent which is our earthly home were destroyed we have a building from God, a dwelling not made by hand, eternal in the heavens.'[457] And a little further on he

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453 Luke 7:48
454 Gal 4:6
455 Cf 1 Cor 7:31.
456 See Screech 155–7 and 172 for a discussion of this passage in relation to the theme of *peregrinatio*.
457 1 Cor 4:18–5:1

writes: 'And so we are always in good spirits and we know that as long as we are in the body we are travelling far from God, for we walk by faith, not by sight; but we are confident, preferring to be away from the body and to be present with God.'[458] He admits that he is a sojourner because he is still involved with the body on earth but in faith and hope he lives with God. As a sojourner he despised the transient things which he saw with the eyes of his body and he hastened towards the things of eternity which he saw before him with the eyes of faith. It is for this reason that the more someone is but a pilgrim in this life, the happier he is. Since the children of this world are completely at home here, what agony they will suffer when they have to move out of the body, what protests they will utter! But the pious man who has learned from the Christian philosophy to be a stranger to the body as far as possible, leaps forth joyfully, for is he not returning home from exile? But so as to emphasize more strongly that this life is a sojourn in a foreign land, he was not content to say, 'I am a stranger,' but added the word 'sojourner.' (A πάροικος is a person who moves from some place to a stranger's home, while a παρεπίδημος lives in a foreign country.)

It is not proper at this point to recall Plato's dream about the souls fallen from heaven, that are here allotted to different bodies.[459] But from where then has this stranger come? From paradise. And to where is he departing? To the vale of tears. And to where does he hasten? To Jerusalem, our true home; there he will see clearly what he here sees only in outline. The Lord heeds the tears of such people but turns a deaf ear to the cries of those who derive their comfort from this world.

When he adds, 'like all my fathers,' he is undoubtedly referring to those just men Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the others distinguished for their piety. They were wealthy, they were powerful, and yet before God they were all strangers and sojourners; they lived in tents and led a nomadic existence. David built the city of Sion, but nevertheless even he was a sojourner in God's sight. What is otherwise the meaning of his cry: 'Woe is me that my stay has been prolonged?'[460] The important thing is not where the body has its dwelling but where the soul has its home; he therefore adds: 'For a long time my soul was resident in a foreign land.' Blessed is he who is a sojourner for a long time. One person is therefore less of a stranger than another. The less there is that delights a person in this life and the

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458 1 Cor 5:6–8
459 Plato *Phaedrus* 248C–E.
460 Ps 119/120:5

more intensely his soul sighs with longing for that blessed rest, thoroughly wearied as he is by the hardships of this life, the more of a stranger he is before God. And so he awaits the end of this troublesome journey and, almost completely exhausted by all the difficulties which surround him and come one on top of another, he seeks some respite from temptation lest in his human weakness he should succumb.

'Let me go,' he says, 'that I may find relief before I depart and am no more.' On this journey he does not dare to ask for rest from his labours. He must soldier on until the last day of his life and so he prays only for some respite so that he might pause for breath and then return to the fray with renewed vigour. God does not cauterize or use the knife at all times; in the midst of suffering he provides the spirit with mystical comfort. And the speaker is not seeking alleviation from the rulers, from his friends or relatives, but from God so that the spirit might gain relief from the same source as the flesh derived its sufferings. Some people who were zealous in their piety have been dissatisfied because after prolonged hardship, fasting, nights spent in prayer, distributing alms and after prayers and meditations they did not experience that hidden rapture of the mind by which God, breathing from within on those who love him, is accustomed to give them an occasional foretaste of eternal bliss. Jean Gerson[461] is said to have experienced something of this kind and I know that it is said not only of him: other people, too, have complained of the same thing. But as that spiritual joy provides not only consolation in affliction but also proof that we are the sons of God, pious men, fearing that God may not be sufficiently well disposed towards them, pray that they may be revived by this breath before they depart this life, no doubt in order that they may leave this world with greater confidence, strengthened by the evidence of the spirit.

In this life God grants such spiritual comfort more frequently to some, to others more rarely; and similarly to some it is given sooner, to others later – to some even on their very deathbed: in his inscrutable wisdom he knows what is to each person's advantage. No one should cease to perform good deeds or abandon his willingness to endure hardship if he does not immediately experience this spiritual joy. God is pleased if grace is sometimes extorted from him, so to speak, but at times he bestows it in ample measure of his own accord. Let us entrust ourselves to his will in all matters, giving

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461 Jean Gerson (1363–1429) was a theologian, mystic, and chancellor of the University of Paris who worked hard for the cause of church unity at the time of the great schism in the West and for the renewal of the spiritual life of the church.

thanks to him for sadness and joy alike. St Paul, too, did not remain silent about this reviving influence when he said: 'Moreover, he who prepared us for this very thing is God who also gave us the pledge of the spirit.'[462] This undoubtedly refers to the comfort on this troublesome journey, and it would not be absurd to interpret the words of the psalm to mean: 'Soften the force of your hand under whose attack I grow weak. Allow me to rest for a while from the stress of battle so that, just as I have hitherto recognised your justice in punishing, so I may experience your mercy when offering consolation. Life is short and death, which is the grimmest thing of all, is close at hand. So, then, that I might be stronger when I reach that final conflict which is by far the most intense of all, allow me now to recover a while from my misfortunes. Or if you wish my suffering to continue unremittingly in this life, breathe your comfort from within to alleviate the distress caused by my troubles.' He asks this before he goes away and is no more, in other words, before he departs this life, never to return. As long as we live here where the struggle takes place, there is a danger that we may be overcome, as well as hope of victory. After this life there is no opportunity to continue the fight and no hope of a prize unless it has been won in this life. But a break in the struggle gives strength to those who are fighting, and when they have recovered their breath, they return to the fight more eagerly, as if with renewed strength. Sometimes the commander's voice can rouse the army's force while at other times a gift of money will make each soldier more keen. A man taking part in a boxing or wrestling match is sometimes spurred on by the audience's applause and acclaim. In the same way our commander, too, either dispels the storm of troubles and grants his soldiers a period in which to recover or he increases their strength and eagerness of spirit by means of mystical inspiration; as a result, although the suffering may be too much for human strength to bear, they will endure it with spirit unbroken. If this were not so, which of the martyrs would not have succumbed when the tyrants inflicted those cruel tortures (which we shudder to mention even though we only know about them from hearsay), had not the gift of the spirit strengthened them from within?

Instead of the reading we give ('release me') or that of Jerome ('spare me'),[463] some scholars have given the translation 'turn away from me.' There is a discrepancy in the wording but the sense is consistent. Idythun was op-

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462 2 Cor 1:22

463 Jerome in his translation of the Psalms from Hebrew: *Liber psalmorum* PL 28 (1846) 1157

pressed by the strong hand of the Lord and in his human weakness he was in danger of giving way, unable to bear the pressure of temptation. He perceives that he is wrestling not with men but with God, with whose permission the wicked are enabled to do whatever they can. However, if God were to oppress a man as he deserves, he would by no means be able to stand firm. So God is said to turn away when he ceases to oppress. But in the Bible God is sometimes asked to go away, sometimes to be present. Anyone who fears the judge because he has a guilty conscience echoes Peter's words: 'O Lord, go away from me because I am a sinful man,'[464] while those who hope for mercy cry out: 'Stir up your might and come. Show your face and we shall be saved.'[465] We pray that the just judge may go away and that a merciful and compassionate one may come; that the punisher may go away and a saviour come. However, he does not say, 'go away,' but 'turn away.' Anyone who gives way and yields, who is compliant and does not exercise his authority, can be said to turn away. And so even pious men sometimes ask God to turn away his face, sometimes to look upon them. 'Turn your face away from my sins.'[466] No one, however holy, can bear the eye of divine justice but the eye of mercy is turned on the just[467] who are called just for the very reason that they acknowledge their injustice. And the psalmist says: 'Who will stand firm before the face of his cold?' while in another passage he cries out: 'Seek the face of the Lord always.'[468] The Lord, then, has two faces and two pairs of eyes, those of justice, with which he inspires fear, and those of mercy, which he uses to assist and restore. When Idythun cries out: 'Turn away from me,' he is calling for the creator's mercy rather than his justice and summons him as a saviour rather than an avenger, in the hope that God may be well disposed to him before his soul leaves his body – 'before I depart and am no more,' in other words, exist no longer. The two phrases are to be taken together, the latter referring to departure from this world, a departure which allows of no return. Far be it from us to suggest that Idythun is of the same opinion as certain philosophers or as the Sadducees who believed that nothing remains after death except the person's corpse; but he has used a Jewish figure of speech to indicate natural death, as in the sentence: 'Rachel wept for her children and refused to be comforted

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464 Luke 5:8
465 Ps 79:3–4/80:2–3
466 Ps 50:11/51:9
467 Cf Ps 33:16/34:15; 1 Pet 3:12.
468 Ps 147:17; 104/105:4

because they are not.'[469] He says that those who are dead 'are not,' not because their souls have been destroyed but because they no longer exist for us. Similarly Jeremiah says: 'Our fathers have passed away and they are not,'[470] and in Psalm 36 it is said, 'Yet a little while and the sinner will not be.'[471] But the Jews usually bury their dead with a great display of grief because before the coming of the Saviour the souls of the pious had not yet flown up to heaven but were held fast in the infernal regions; this is also why those on the point of death very often weep. Thus Ezekiel says: 'I said in the midst of my days I shall go to the gates of hell,'[472] and Job in his tenth chapter says: 'Before I go to the land of darkness, shrouded in the gloom of death from which I shall not return.'[473] What the psalmist expresses in the words 'I shall not be,' Job expresses by 'I shall not return.'

But now that Christ has conquered the kingdom of hell, pious men no longer weep when death is at hand; instead, they long to depart and to be with Christ,[474] and they fall into a pleasant sleep, confident in the hope of resurrection. Many of the Jews did not believe in the resurrection and those who did believe did so less ardently than we who have heard Christ explicitly promising the resurrection of the body and have seen him who was truly dead come truly back to life in the same body which had lain dead in the tomb. Did not St Andrew meet his death on the cross with great eagerness? And for Paul to die is gain[475] because death brings one directly to Christ. We have seen that the martyrs experienced a similar eagerness of spirit amidst horrific physical tortures.

This psalm, however, still has a certain Jewish content and does not present us with an example of Christian perfection, but of a man still wrestling with the flesh. That is why, as he gradually advances through his suffering, losing faith in human resources, he turns his eyes to the Lord: he now understands that he is being justly and deservedly punished for his sins by the Lord and he does not ask anyone else to release him from his sufferings but only him who he knows inflicted them. He prays for the Lord's mercy, in the hope that he who was savage in his anger might

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469 Jer 31:15; Matt 2:18
470 Lam 5:7
471 Ps 36/37:10
472 Erasmus is here mistaken: this verse occurs at Isa 38:10.
473 Job 10:21
474 Phil 1:23
475 Phil 1:21

become kind and might alleviate his suffering; he hopes that this might happen before the last day of his life arrives so that, reconciled to God, he can depart from this life more safely and securely.

The present psalm does not indicate whether Idythun obtains what he is seeking; it leaves him tormented by uncertainty and beseeching in tears. However, the following psalm makes it clear that God did not turn a deaf ear to his tears and prayers for it says there: 'He has put a new song in my mouth, a song to our God.'[476] Psalm 38 contains the old song, a song of repentance, while the next one contains a song of thanksgiving which is sung to God, not to men. The former is sung in the synagogue, the latter in the church, for the Law threatened punishment for those who transgressed while the gospel promises grace to those who believe. Furthermore, my dear friends, if there are any among us who have not yet advanced to a state of Christian eagerness, let them at least progress as far as Idythun here, realizing that misfortunes are not inflicted on us by the stars nor by men nor by fortune nor by Satan but by God when he is offended by human sins, and that he uses the whip not to destroy but to correct. Let them bear this in mind to prevent them plotting revenge or hurling abuse in answer to abuse, or paying back injuries or murmuring in anger against God; instead they should bear in silence and with resignation the pain which rages within them, reflecting thus to themselves: 'The Lord is just; I have deserved worse things.' In addition, considering the wretchedness of this life as well as its brevity, they should turn their thoughts completely from a desire for things which are empty and liable to vanish like shadows, to the eternal benefits promised to the pious in the life to come. Then let them take care that, before the death of the body, they may be purged of their sins, which cause the Lord to inflict outward torments: they must be aware that after this life judgment alone awaits them. If they have progressed to this point and if their cries to the Lord have been importunate and accompanied by tears, they will be transformed by their sufferings and after the song of penitence they will sing a song of victory and will say: 'I waited patiently for the Lord and he heard me.'[477]

Perhaps this thought will occur to someone: 'If we believe that it is the hand of the Lord which is punishing us, why do we not endure in silence any suffering which afflicts us? He knows how much we need to free us from our faults.' In our weakness we have been permitted to use blameless reasonings to rid ourselves of those things which oppress our nature, or, if

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476 Ps 39:4/40:3
477 Ps 39:2/40:1

this is impossible, to pray that the Lord may release us. In the same way a boy may cry out while he is being beaten and may long for an end to the painful treatment even though he knows that his father loves him and is punishing him for his own good. But the Lord wants us to entreat him so that he can show pity sooner and grant more abundant recompense for the anguish caused by temptation, if only we end our prayers by adding: 'Nevertheless, not as I wish but as you do.'[478] It did Paul no harm to call on the Lord three times when he was worn out by Satan's scourging, but it redounded to his praise that he listened calmly when he was told: 'My grace is sufficient for you.'[479]

I am aware that in many passages of my exposition of this psalm I have departed from the interpretations given by the ancient writers who also disagree among themselves – more with regard to this psalm than almost any other; and at times certain parts seem to be given a rather farfetched interpretation because the teachers of old, following Origen's example, indulged in allegorical explanations. In the case of some of these they appear to be mistaken, or rather misled, either by a textual error or through the fault of the translator. For example, in the passage where it is written 'and what is the number of my days?' some people philosophize ingeniously about those days which have no number as if it were hardly fitting for Idythun to wish to know the end of this life but he should aspire to eternal life. (But Augustine, as we mentioned before, certainly gives an intelligent and pious Platonist interpretation when he reads 'who is' – that is, *qui est* for *quid est* – because in this world nothing truly exists except the one who said 'I am who I am,'[480] although neither the original Hebrew text nor the Greek translation allows the relative pronoun to be accepted here.)[481] But they interpret what follows ('so that I may know what I lack') as having the same meaning, as if these words were spoken by one who longs for immortality. This suggestion is not wrong although it is in fact not expressly stated by the prophet's words, but merely implied by them. It is logical that a just man who is thoroughly wearied by the troubles of this life should long for eternal rest. Similarly, they also interpret 'the end' to mean Christ who is the end of the Law, or rather the beginning and end of the whole church, in other words its starting point and its fulfilment.[482]

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478 Matt 26:39
479 2 Cor 12:9
480 Exod 3:14
481 Cf Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 38* 7 PL 36 418.
482 Cf Rom 10:4; Rev 21:6, 22:13.

Now some writers[483] mistakenly translated παλαιστάς as 'old,' instead of 'short,' which is the reading given by Jerome who preserves the sense although he changes the word; but however much they argue about their explanation of this word, it cannot be fitted to the true sense of this passage. Nor is the alternative suggestion offered by other exegetes any more fitting, when they take *palaestas* to mean 'wrestlers,'[484] for although the Greek word has something to do with a wrestling match, the original Hebrew text rejects such an interpretation. It is generally agreed that a *palaesta* is a small fist and I do not know whether wrestling masters can be called *palaestae*; certainly it is something I have not yet ascertained. Similarly, they distort the prophet's words, 'he passes in a shadow,' to apply to Christ who is the image of the Father and to man who was made in the image of God.[485] But what has this to do with the prophet's intention of stressing the futility of human actions?

It is the same with the verses 'Since you have done it, remove your blows from me.' Augustine reads: 'Since you have made me,'[486] although neither the Hebrew nor the Greek text contains the pronoun 'me.' Nor is it ἔπλασας (that is, 'you have created') which is used, but ἐποίησας ('you have done') which refers more properly to the blows than to the man.

Finally, the very last verse ('Let me go that I may find relief before I depart') is taken by some to refer to the remission of sins and that is not really wrong if you accept that again there is an example of synecdoche here.[487] If a man's sufferings are alleviated, it implies that the sins for which he was being punished have now been forgiven. But if someone uses the phrase 'let me go' (ἄνες), he is not asking for forgiveness of sins but for rest from suffering: in the Lord's prayer the Greek word used is ἄφες not ἄνες.[488] And with regard to the phrase, 'and am no more,' different suggestions are made: I shall no longer be a sojourner, or I shall not be susceptible to illusion, or I shall not be in a position to deserve, or I shall not be, in other words, I shall be destroyed with the wicked, for the wicked are and are not, just as they live and do not live.

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483 Eg Origen, Ambrose, and Augustine
484 Eg Ambrose *Enarratio in psalmum 38* 19 PL 14 (1845) 1048
485 Ambrose *Enarratio in psalmum 38* 24 PL 14 (1845) 1051
486 Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 38* 16 PL 36 426
487 Cf eg Ambrose *Enarratio in psalmum 38* 37 PL 14 (1845) 1057–8.
488 The use of ἄφες (from the Greek verb ἀφίημι) in the Lord's prayer implies that forgiveness of one's sins is being demanded, rather than merely rest from suffering, as is the case in the Greek of Ps 38:14/39:13.

It is not my intention to find fault with the pious and learned men who have discussed many things of this kind in connection with this psalm, but I have preferred to follow the interpretation which seemed to me the least complicated and most suited to the tone and the logic of the psalm as a whole. Of course I am aware that a certain licence is allowed to those who use allegory in their interpretation and that allegory – even when it is misleading – has a charm and a piety of its own as long as it is handled carefully.[489] However, I consider it to be the mark of a good teacher at no point consciously to depart from the true sense of Scripture and if this is not absolutely clear, it is better to refrain from making dogmatic assertions,[490] and not to mention everything which can be said when the opportunity arises, but only those things which seem closest to the truth when compared with other scriptural passages and accommodated to the continuity of sense in the argument as a whole. But if the Lord should inspire someone with something better, he must first be silent[491] and give thanks to the Holy Spirit. At the same time we must all pray together, beseeching our supreme leader, Jesus Christ, that those who have been appointed to instruct the people may utter only prophecies to the Lord's flock, in other words, a doctrine which is not earthly but heavenly, and that the people may dance to their song, carried away too by the spirit of prophecy; for to dance prophetically is to obey with enthusiasm the commands of God, to whom be praise and honour for evermore. Amen.

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489 Erasmus himself strove to maintain a middle way between the allegorical and literal forms of exegesis. He recognized that the literal interpretation had occasionally to be abandoned to avoid absurdity, but that on the whole the literal or historical interpretation had to form the basis for any allegorical interpretation (cf *De concordia* 137 below). On Erasmus' views on biblical exegesis and his attitude to allegory, see Henri de Lubac *Éxegèse médiévale* (Paris 1959–64) II part 2 438–53; Chomarat I 680; Manfred Hoffman *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto 1994) 101–33.

490 On Erasmus' belief that the unity of the church was threatened by those who insisted on narrow dogmatic assertions, see Manfred Hoffman 'Language and Reconciliation: Erasmus' Ecumenical Attitude' ERSY 15 (1995) 78–9.

491 Cf 1 Cor 14:30.

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ON MENDING THE PEACE OF THE CHURCH

De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia

translated and annotated by

EMILY KEARNS

The genesis of the *De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia* 'On Mending the Peace of the Church' may go back to 1530 and the attempt of the Diet of Augsburg to find a solution to the continuing religious crisis. Despite the hopes of many that he would lend support to the Diet, Erasmus had made excuses and declined to attend. But even if at times he despaired, the issue of the split in the church could never have been far from his mind. Indeed, Erika Rummel has seen in his correspondence an indication that some of the material which would become the last part of the *De concordia* was already taking shape in 1530, in response to the general expectation of some sort of pronouncement.[1] On both sides of the divide those who wished for peace continued in the next two years to press Erasmus to join them in actively seeking unity. In 1532 he responded with a short *Precatio pro pace ecclesiae*,[2] and in the summer of 1533 the *De concordia* appeared. It was dedicated to Julius Pflug, an increasingly prominent German ecclesiastic and one of those on the Catholic side who were seeking a settlement that might reconcile the rapidly hardening confessional groups.[3] Erasmus had been in correspondence with Pflug since 1530, and it seems clear that his mention in the dedicatory letter of Pflug's desire that he should 'step forward to quell the present storm' is not merely conventional.

There was a secondary motive for Erasmus in issuing his thoughts as a response to Pflug, and in doing so within the framework of a commentary on Psalm 83. In 1530 Agostino Steuco, writing against the Lutherans, had attacked Erasmus, and indeed the German nation in general (of which Erasmus often considered himself a part); already in 1528 he had criticized Erasmus' Hebrew etymology.[4] Earlier in 1533 Steuco had published a commentary on Psalms 18 and 138 which he dedicated to Pflug; it was therefore a shrewd move for Erasmus to produce his own psalm commentary

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1 Epp 2336, 2342; E. Rummel 'Erasmus and the Restoration of Unity in the Church' in H.P. Louthan and R.C. Zachman eds *Conciliation and Confession: The Struggle for Unity in the Age of Reform, 1415–1648* (Notre Dame, Ind 2004) 62–72

2 On this work see Pabel *Erasmus' Vision* 87–9, and also his *Conversing with God* (Toronto 1997) 184.

3 See CEBR III 77–8; J.V. Pollet *Julius Pflug (1499–1564) et la crise religieuse dans l'Allemagne du XVIe siècle* (Leiden 1990–1) especially 50–61.

4 See CEBR III 285–6; R.K. Delph, 'From Venetian Visitor to Curial Humanist: The Development of Agostino Steuco's "Counter"-Reformation Thought' RQ 47 (1994) 102–39, especially 110–12. On Steuco and the *De sarcienda*, see J.V. Pollet, 'Origine et structure du *De sarcienda ecclesiae concordia* (1533) d'Érasme' in *Scrinium Erasmianum* II 183–95.

Medallion of Julius Pflug by Friedrich Hagenauer (1530)
Augustiner-Chorherrenstift, Herzogenburg. Inv.nr.3256

dedicated to the same man, in a volume also containing a text of Pflug's letter of May 1533 to Erasmus (Ep 2806), in which he praises Erasmus' moderation and deplores Steuco's lack of it.

The work is apt to strike the reader as curiously lopsided. If the real point at issue, eagerly awaited by many, was Erasmus' recipe for ending the disunity in the church, why spend so long on the exegesis of a psalm? Of course, in all the psalm commentaries Erasmus frequently uses the biblical words as the basis for a discussion of more general issues, often with special contemporary relevance. There was a close precedent in the *De bello turcico* of 1530 (CWE 64 201–65), which begins as a commentary on Psalm 28, but there the proportions are different: the commentary is over quite briskly, and the bulk of the work is devoted to a discussion of the immediate issue of whether, and how, to wage war against the Ottomans. But in fact there are some advantages in following the format of a psalm commentary. The decision to respond to Pflug's request with a work in this genre allows Erasmus to do some scene-setting and to direct the reader's mood and sympathies before tackling contemporary issues head-on – always supposing, of course, that the impatient reader did not turn first to the end of the work to see its author's latest pronouncements on the situation in the church. The commentary unfolds at a leisurely pace, beginning with the psalm's heading, which permits Erasmus both to execrate schismatics (Korah) and to counsel unity with good men (the sons of Korah). The same lesson proceeds from the opening verse, 'How lovely are thy tabernacles,' where Erasmus launches into a diatribe against the early Christian heretics, including the long narrative of a supposed plot against Athanasius by the Arians. Although he makes sensationalist allegations against nameless contemporaries, in fact his readers could surely all concur in opposing such heresies, and so in this section he is implicitly indicating the extent of the common ground between Catholics and Reformers. He continues in this direction throughout the exposition of the psalm, but although mention of heretics recurs as a kind of thread running through the work, the main emphasis now is on the positive side: the church, the lovely tabernacle and the house of God, is properly a place of blessedness and peace, indeed the only abode of true peace.

When Erasmus reaches the end of the psalm and moves from the ideal church to the painful situation on earth, he carries the reader with him: surely every effort must be made to accommodate the state of contemporary Christendom to the abode of God, which is one and perfect. Just as we might expect, he is careful not to use his earlier evocation of heresy and schism to taint the Lutherans – though he is less tactful with the Anabaptists and other more radical groups. Rather, he indicates, all are at fault, and

all have an obligation to put things right. But the question remains, how is this to be done? It is perhaps not surprising that Erasmus at first seems reluctant to make concrete suggestions or put forward a clear programme, and the structure of this last section is suggestive of his difficulties. The first part is essentially an exhortation to individuals to lead a life more in tune with Christian charity, and in particular to avoid overzealous criticism of others in the church. He sees such criticism as having played a key role in bringing about the present crisis. 'It is worse to leave the company of the church and take oneself off to heresy or schism than to lead an impure life while remaining sound in doctrine,' he says, a point which may at first glance appear to jar with his well-known remark in the *Colloquies* about the many saints who are not in the calendar.[5] But the context here requires a much stronger identification of the church with its visible counterpart on earth than was the case in the earlier work;[6] just so, in commenting on the efficacy of good works, he has already dismissed pagan virtues as useless because they were practised outside the church.[7] Alongside this inherently conservative, if relatively uncontroversial, view Erasmus also emphasizes a favourite point: the need for individuals to practise a genuinely Christian life. In accord with the personal and spiritual emphasis in the psalm commentary proper, he sees a main part of the solution to the problem in a change of heart on the part of the individual. This will lead, in Erasmus' view, to a change in society, since it is part of the individual's duty to play his or her proper part in society at large. 'Let each one of us be what he ought to be. Popes must be true popes ... princes must be true princes ...' and so on, down to petty tradesmen and peasants. These two points are two sides of the same coin, since if all perform their duties properly, there will be no ground for the destructive criticism that is tearing the church apart.

Erasmus next moves on to specifics, attempting to find a formula for agreement on the main contentious issues: free will and justification, prayers for the dead and prayers through saints, images of the saints, confession, the mass, feast days, the practice of fasting, and the status of episcopal decrees. From his point-by-point treatment of these topics Rummel has identified five basic principles: agreement on the use of 'wording vague enough to satisfy all parties'; suspension of a decision until the summoning of a

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5 See 197 below; the colloquy *Convivium religiosum* CWE 39 192.

6 This identification is not quite complete since, following Augustine, Erasmus admits that only God can know who truly belongs to his church (152 and n79 below).

7 See 170–1 below.

general council; recognition that some questions could be left to the individual; maintenance of the *status quo* when in doubt (or to put it more positively, an appeal to the consensus of the church); and the use of 'condescension' or mutual accommodation (*synkatabasis*).[8] It is obvious, as she says, that these principles cannot all be applied at once, and that several tend in divergent directions. Hilmar Pabel in an important essay has laid stress both on 'give-and-take' and on consensus, placing the latter in the context of Erasmus' enthusiasm for the idea in other works.[9] But although Erasmus does not present a clear basis for choosing between approaches in particular issues, he does give a special emphasis to *synkatabasis* by placing it at the end of his list of specifics. This is the remedy that should be applied in all cases, until a council has made its pronouncements. It has to be admitted that even in this section Erasmus appears to hold on to his options and to use qualifications in such a way as to leave the reader in doubt about where he stands. 'Those who keep to what has for so long been laid down have the better case,' he says; then, evidently fearing he has been less than irenic, he immediately adds 'this piece of advice applies to both sides'. But there can be no doubt of his desire to see restraint and reasonableness instead of strife – 'surely it is absolutely fair for those who would not wish to suffer violence for religious reasons to refrain from inflicting it on others' – and it seems that the complex of ideas summed up in the word *synkatabasis* was for him the best way to achieve this.

Finally Erasmus discusses radical groups, chiefly the Anabaptists and Sabbatarians. (He has already mentioned groups holding extreme eucharistic views in his section on the mass.) By placing these groups after his summing-up on reconciliation he implies that they are a different case from the more moderate Reformers and their followers, and likely to be beyond such methods – though to be sure this section follows a rather pessimistic conclusion on the prospects of *synkatabasis* and a council. Erasmus' attitude to the Anabaptists is not essentially different here from the views expressed in his letters.[10] There he expresses some admiration for their moral

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8 On the last principle, see 201 and n374, 213 below; see also Turchetti 'Une question mal posée.'

9 Hilmar M. Pabel 'The Peaceful People of Christ: The Irenic Ecclesiology of Erasmus of Rotterdam' in Pabel *Erasmus' Vision* 57–93, especially 77–81, 84–7. See also J.K. McConica 'Erasmus and the Grammar of Consent' in *Scrinium Erasmianum* II 77–99.

10 Epp 2134:213–15, 2149:40–1, 2341; see R.H. Bainton 'Erasmus and the Persecuted' in *Scrinium Erasmianum* II 196–202.

uprightness, while strongly disapproving their stance on matters of faith. Here it is precisely their heretical views and schismatic position which are foregrounded, but it is nonetheless significant that he sees them as misguided rather than malicious.

On account of its topicality the work's textual history is a little more complex than that of some of the other psalm commentaries. The first edition is the quarto published by Froben in 1533. Though the main title page has the words 'liber de *sarcienda* ecclesiae concordia,' the main work's introduction and the running heads give the alternative title 'de *amabili* ecclesiae concordia' (on the lovely [or lovable] peace of the church), which became standard after the Basel *Opera omnia* of 1540. The alternatives perhaps suggest different ways of reading the text, the first suggesting a practical programme, the second emphasizing the more general material contained in the first part of the work. This edition was quickly followed by six more (three in Antwerp, one each in Cologne, Leipzig, and Paris) before Froben's octavo edition, lightly revised by Erasmus (*per autorem recognitus*), appeared early in 1534. Following this, the work was reprinted three more times before the *Opera omnia* of 1540. The early editions all contain, in addition to the main work and its prefatory letter, a text of Ep 2806 from Pflug to Erasmus, as well as the *Precatio pro pace ecclesiae*, first printed in Freiburg the year before the *De concordia*, along with its short prefatory letter (Ep 2618).

The interest, or at least potential interest, implied by the rapid reprintings of the text is mirrored in the number of vernacular versions, of which four (two in German and one each in Dutch and Danish) were produced within two years. Evidently there were also translations into French and English. Full details of early editions and translations are given in R. Stupperich's introduction to his edition of the work in ASD V-3 254–5. Of modern English translations, the most helpful is that by Raymond Himelick, with notes, in his *Erasmus and the Seamless Coat of Jesus* (Lafayette 1971).

The present translation is based on the second edition, the octavo edition published by Froben in 1534, with reference also to the text established by Stupperich in ASD V-3 258–313. Differences from the first edition are signalled in the notes. In quoting the text of the psalm itself Erasmus is more than usually allusive, and so the 'working text' of the psalm which follows has, where necessary, filled in the gaps from the Vulgate.

EK

PSALM 83

1 In finem pro torcularibus filiis Corae psalmus [Vincenti pro torcularibus filiorum Corae psalmus]

2 Quam dilecta [amabilia] tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum.

3 Concupiscit et deficit anima mea in atria Domini: cor meum et caro exsultaverunt in Deo vivo.

4 Etenim passer invenit sibi domum, et turtur nidum sibi ubi ponat pullos suos: altaria tua, Domine virtutum, rex meus et Deus meus.

5 Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te. *Selah* [diapsalma].

6 Beatus vir [homo] cuius est auxilium abs te; ascensiones disponit in corde suo,

7 In valle lacrimarum, in loco quem posuit.

8 Etenim benedictionem dabit legis dator; ibunt de virtute in virtutem, et videbitur Deus deorum in Sion.

9 Domine, Deus virtutum, exaudi orationem meam, auribus percipe, Deus Iacob. *Selah* [diapsalma].

10 Protector noster, aspice, Deus, et respice in faciem christi tui.

11 Quia melior est dies unus in atriis tuis super milia; elegi abiectus esse in domo Dei mei magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum.

12 Quia misericordiam et veritatem diligit Deus [Quia sol et scutum Dominus Deus]; gratiam et gloriam dabit Dominus.

13 Dominus non privabit bonis eos qui ambulant in innocentia. Domine virtutum, beatus homo qui sperat in te.

1 Towards the end, for the wine-presses, a psalm to the sons of Korah [To the victor, for the wine-presses, a psalm of the sons of Korah]

2 How delightful [lovely] are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.

3 My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.

4 The sparrow has found a home for herself, and the turtle dove a nest where she may lay her young: your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

5 Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord: they will praise you for ever. *Selah*.

6 Blessed is the man [the human being] whose help is from you: he builds in his heart steps leading upwards,

7 In the vale of tears, in the place where he has put <us>.

8 Indeed, the giver of the law will grant his blessing: they will go from strength to strength, and the God of gods will be seen in Sion.

9 Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob. *Selah*.

10 Behold, O God our protector, and look upon the face of your Christ.

11 For one day in your courts is better than thousands. I have chosen to lie cast down in the house of my God rather than dwell in the tents of sinners.

12 For God loves mercy and truth [The Lord God is a sun and a shield], and the Lord will give grace and glory.

13 The Lord will not take good things from those who walk in innocence. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who places hope in you.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM TO THE DISTINGUISHED JULIUS PFLUG, GREETING[1]

In your many letters to me, dear Julius, my honoured friend, you show how deeply you regret these ever worsening quarrels and how ardently you long for peace in the church, a desire you share with all good men. You are always singing the same tune, pressing me with the greatest urgency, that I step forward to quell the present storm. This request is about as seemly as asking a pygmy to take the place of Atlas and hold up the sky; yet you allow me no excuse.

You are badly mistaken, my dear Julius, through ignorance of my abilities. But the extent of your error only serves to show how deeply devoted you are to the house of God, in which you hold an honoured place, and most deservedly so in view of your outstanding virtues. And the honour becomes you all the more because it stirs in you no trace of pride; rather you recognize here the generous hand of the Lord. If the Christian world had more men like you, either these troubles would not have arisen, or they would have been settled long ago. I find myself trapped, as the saying goes, between the knife and the altar,[2] for you will not allow me to refuse your request, nor do I have it in me to comply. So I have found a middle course which, I hope, will go some distance towards appeasing you in future. I have written about Psalm 83, in which the divine Spirit strongly commends to us the peace of the church. For in matters of this kind, where a good part of success lies in the readiness of the will, exhortation has considerable value; and where the will exists, the help of a benevolent God is never wanting. But if Christ is pleased to grant that the hearts of all are seized by a passion for the peace of the church, which you desire so fervently, then it will not be long before you will have no need to make your request nor I to refuse, and each of us will congratulate the other. But I shall not keep you any longer from the psalm.

Freiburg im Breisgau, 31 July 1533

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1 The dedicatory letter is Ep 2852; on Julius Pflug, see CEBR III 77–8.

2 Adagia I i 15: *Inter sacrum et saxum*

ON MENDING THE PEACE OF THE CHURCH

I have chosen the Eighty-third Psalm for exposition because here the Holy Spirit, with great clarity and great insistence, using many lines of argument, commends to us the fair and blissful concord of the church; a useful and salutary message for all times, but in our own age, so fertile in schisms, one which seems necessary as never before. It therefore befits all lovers of that peace which according to St Paul 'passes all understanding,'[1] and which alone defends our minds and bodies from all evils and keeps them in Jesus Christ our Lord, the peacemaker, to bring their full attention to what I have to say.

The heading presents a few problems, but when we have dealt with these as briefly as possible we shall be all the more eager to come to the contemplation of this most beautiful and most desirable vision. The words of the heading differ somewhat in the various manuscripts, either through the agency of copyists or because of the ambiguity of the Hebrew. The Septuagint has 'Towards the end, for the wine presses, a psalm to the sons of Korah,' while Jerome renders it 'To the victor, for the wine presses, a psalm of the sons of Korah.'[2] On hearing 'towards the end,' one should realize that the psalm refers to Christ, who is 'the end' – that is, the consummation – 'of the Law to every believer.'[3] For the only true and perfect righteousness comes through a sincere trust in him who alone by faith purifies the hearts of men. The words 'to the victor' or 'for victory' will immediately remind you of St Paul's saying that no one may attain that blessed wreath which never fades if he has not been a lawful contestant.[4] A Hebrew

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1 Phil 4:7
2 The heading of the psalm in Jerome's *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* PL 28 (1890) 274
3 Rom 10:4
4 Cf 1 Cor 9:24–6 (and 1 Pet 5:4); 2 Tim 2:5.

scholar has pointed out that instead of 'to the victor' we could translate 'to him who sheds his blood,'[5] showing that this is no light and bloodless skirmish, but a fierce battle, a 'war without truce' as the Greeks say.[6] Let us recall how often the soldiers of this world expose their bodies to enemy weapons and entrust their lives to the uncertain chances of war in order to gain applause, an ovation,[7] or indeed a triumph – but one which is absurd and ludicrous rather than impressive, which no serious-minded man.[8] could view without laughter, and whose whole splendid show is over in a single day. What, then, will the soldiers of Christ not do to win that eternal triumph in heaven? Let us think of the great glory now enjoyed by the martyrs, who spilled their blood and 'by faith conquered kingdoms, practised righteousness, and obtained blessed promises.'[9] Their praises resound through the whole world and they are hailed by angels as with their general, Christ, they celebrate an everlasting triumph in the heavenly Jerusalem. But those who take heed of Paul and through love of Christ mortify their members which are upon earth, that is, lust, avarice, anger, and other emotions of that kind,[10] which naturally fight against the spirit, these also take part in a bloody war and conquer Satan. And in the text itself the word 'tabernacles' or 'tents,' which is properly a military term, occurs. The title continues 'for the wine presses.' This puzzled St Augustine, because there is no reference to wine presses in the text, and thus he had recourse to an allegorical explanation.[11] However, he could have observed that the headings of psalms sometimes refer to historical events (such as Psalm 33, 'A psalm of David when he changed his face before Abimelech, and he dismissed him and he went away'),[12] and sometimes to the festival at which the psalm is

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5 I have not found a source for this rather suspect-sounding statement. It is just possible that it is developed from the discussion of the heading of Psalm 8 by Nicholas of Lyra *Postilla super Psalterium*, vol III in multi-volume Latin Bible sets, who links the wine presses with the instruments of the passion (Christ's blood was pressed out like wine); the passage continues: 'for which he attained complete victory and a crown of glory.'

6 *Adagia* III iii 84: Ἄσπονδος πόλεμος 'A Truceless War'

7 Technical term in ancient Rome for a lesser form of triumph

8 'no serious-minded man' (*nemo vir gravis*): On the translation of *vir* and *homo*, see n230 below.

9 Heb 11:33

10 Cf Col 3:5

11 In his commentary on this psalm Augustine explains the presses as the service of God, which abolishes 'free' passions (CCL 10 1146–50).

12 The heading is treated at great length in Erasmus' exposition of Psalm 33 CWE 64 275–306.

to be sung (such as Psalm 91, 'A psalm or song for the sabbath day,' Psalm 92, 'A song of praise of David on the eve of the sabbath,' or Psalm 93, 'A psalm of David for the fourth day after the sabbath'). It is wrong to reject the historical reference to make room for allegory; history is the basis and foundation of allegory, and a knowledge of history enables us better to expound the more abstruse and mystical significance. Here the words 'for the wine presses' in the psalm's heading refer to the seventh month, our September.[13] The ancients made March the beginning of the year, when the sun enters Aries, and they called the month later known as July 'Quintilis,' since it was the fifth month reckoning from March. The following month, August, was called Sextilis, and the other months up to December took their names from their place in the year. But since September is the time of the vintage it was more expressive and more suited to a mystical sense to say 'for the wine presses' rather than 'in the seventh month.' (Similarly when Horace wants to refer to the beginning of spring, he says, using a rather pleasing figure, 'with the west winds and the first swallow.')[14] At the same time the words allude to the festival at which this contest of song was held by the prophets. Hence there are some psalm headings which mention lilies or roses, thus denoting spring and its festivals.[15]

The Jews had three chief festivals: Passover, commemorating the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea; Pentecost, commemorating the institution and reception of the Law on Mount Sinai; and the Feast of Tabernacles, which I shall shortly describe.[16] The first fell at the beginning of spring, the second later in the same season, and the third in autumn. The Feast of Tabernacles or *scenopegia* – so-called from the pitching of tents – in fact occurred on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when it was ordained that the people were to remain in their tents for seven days in memory of ancient times, when they fled from Egypt and for forty years journeyed

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13 The connection is made by Nicholas of Lyra *Postilla super Psalterium*, vol III in multi-volume Latin Bible sets, a writer used more than once by Erasmus in commenting on this psalm, though often despised by him because of Nicholas' fondness for the literal sense of Scripture. Here the choice of source obviously fits the insistence in this passage that the literal, historical sense be properly understood before embarking on an allegorical interpretation.

14 Horace *Epistles* 1.7.13

15 Psalms 44/45, 68/69, and 79/80 mention lilies (but not roses) in the version of Jerome's *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* PL 28 (1890) 1161, 1178, 1191, but not in the Vulgate.

16 Here the source is Pseudo-Jerome's commentary on Psalm 80/81, in *Breviarium in psalmos* PL 26 (1845) 108A–B.

through a vast and barren wilderness, living all the while in their tents. Their way was shown to them by God, in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day; through his goodness they suffered no lack of food or drink, and their clothes and shoes were not worn away. During that period even their temple was a tabernacle, and so it remained until Solomon built the famous and magnificent[17] temple at Jerusalem,[18] which was an object of awe even to the gentiles. So that they might not forget the providential care of so gracious a power, and also to preserve the tradition of these great wonders among their descendants, it was ordained that every year at the time of the vintage they should celebrate a Feast of Tabernacles, lasting for eight days. This occurs in the seventh month, which is in a sense the sabbath of the months, similar to the seventh day, the seventh year – when the earth too had its share of rest – and the jubilee year, which completed seven seven-year periods.[19] The first of these eight days in the seventh month was a sabbath, being the beginning of the third week, and so was the eighth day, the beginning of the fourth week; on both the people fasted and abstained from labour. The intervening days were passed with sacrifices, hymns, thanksgiving, and solemn rejoicing. But the eighth day was in a sense the beginning of a new celebration, the assembly or gathering; on that day individuals would collect sums of money for the tabernacle treasury, towards the expenses of sacrifices and offerings.[20] The festival is described in Leviticus 23 and Numbers 29.[21]

The heading, then, makes no overt reference to tabernacles, but it does allude to them implicitly, by referring to the month when all the crops had been harvested and the feast of the pitching of tents was celebrated. In fact almost the whole of that month was spent in festivals and sacrifices, both to provide for the Levites, and to remind the people that everything produced by the earth must be treated as a gift received through divine generosity. In this way they would not misuse abundance in excess and luxury, nor, in the event of a poor harvest, would they give way to despair. They would be reminded by the tabernacles of how, when they were thirsty and journeying through barren deserts, the Lord did not let them go in want of

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17 'and magnificent': Omitted in the first edition
18 3 Kings/1 Kings 6–8
19 Cf Lev 25:4–7 and (for the jubilee year) 8–17.
20 Erasmus (or his source) seems to have misunderstood the Vulgate word *collecta*, which can mean either a collection of money or (as here) a gathering of people.
21 Lev 23:33–6; Num 29:12–38

anything, but sent down manna from heaven and brought forth water from a rock.[22] How could he who thus clothes the lilies of the field and gives the sparrows food[23] allow the servants of his own household to go in want, especially when a dutiful and temperate disposition is satisfied with a modest sufficiency?[24] So it is all the more shocking that today, when God in his beneficence gives a plentiful harvest, some Christians, so far from practising thanksgiving, or generosity to priests and the poor, turn to luxurious living, wantonness, and lust. Then, if their produce is somewhat less, they forget the previous abundance and in their anxiety for the future they put up prices, wring money out of the poor, omit what is due to priests, and put off their creditors. How much more worthy of those who glory in the name of Christ that the generosity of the rich to the poor should increase in proportion as the year's produce is meagre! God did not grant a plentiful harvest so that the corn might rot in your granaries, but so that you might distribute the surplus to the poor. In this way you may seem deserving of the earlier abundance, and in years to come you may merit greater generosity from the Lord.

In a typological sense[25] the Feast of Tabernacles once celebrated by the Jews represents the assembly of the Catholic church. This is made plain by the fourteenth chapter of the prophet Zechariah: 'And the Lord shall strike with ruin all those peoples who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles.'[26] In that same chapter wine presses are mentioned, so it might appear that the title of this psalm derives from the prophetic passage, or the converse.[27] Jerome acutely pointed out that there are three psalms where the headings mention wine presses: Psalm 8, ascribed to David, Psalm 80, to Asaph, and the present Psalm 83, 'of the sons of Korah.'[28] These also have in common the reference to a victory. Now the number eight is dedicated to the glory of the resurrection, since the Lord 'made' the eighth day by rising from the dead. On that day we are bidden to rejoice and exult with spiritual dances.[29] Where there is resurrection, there is life; and life is innocence, as

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22 Exod 16:14–36, 17:5–6
23 Cf Matt 6:28, 10:29–31; Luke 12:6–7.
24 Alluding to the proverbial phrase 'nature is satisfied with a little,' deriving from Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* 5.34.97
25 This phrase is a Greek adverb in the original.
26 Zech 14:17
27 'or the converse': Added in the second edition
28 Pseudo-Jerome *Breviarium in psalmos* PL 26 (1845) 1058B, 1070B–C
29 Cf Ps 117/118:24: 'this is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.'

sin is death.[30] The first day was marked by the creation of man in God's image, the subject of the Eighth Psalm, which shows us that man has been created for the place next to the angels. Man's second day was when he was recalled to innocence through the Law, as is shown in the number eight multiplied by ten (signifying the ten commandments). The third day, with which we are here concerned, brings before us man brought to such perfection by the grace of the gospel that, though his body may remain on earth, through faith and hope he may have converse in heaven.[31] The number three is added to the ten eights because through the light of the gospel the whole world came to recognize plainly the mystery of the Holy Trinity.[32] The Father was known to the Jews; but it was only after the Son assumed human nature, was seen on earth mingling with human beings, and was taken up again into heaven, and after the Spirit was sent from heaven to renew the minds and tongues of all, that the world at last knew clearly one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the same divine nature.

The pagan custom was to celebrate the vintage with unholy and irreligious rites honouring the absurd god Bacchus, indulging wantonly in spontaneous jesting, unseemly dance, and obscene chants; and unfortunately we can see traces of this foolish behaviour still surviving today. But Moses substituted for popular merrymaking religious thanksgiving, for lubricious motions the dances of prophets and psalmists (we read of David, too, dancing before the ark in honour of God),[33] and for obscene verses spiritual psalms, thus converting the impure worship offered to false spirits by other nations into worship of the true God. The pagans too held contests at these festivals. Drunken people, their faces smeared with wine lees, would ride about in carts, hurling scurrilous verses at anyone they met;[34] the victor's

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30 Cf Rom 5:12.

31 Cf Phil 3:20.

32 The numerological interpretation is developed from Pseudo-Jerome *Breviarium in psalmos* PL 26 (1845) 1059A–B, and from a more elaborate tradition represented by the eleventh-century writer Honorius of Autun PL 194 498B–C, 511D. See H. Meyer and Rudolf Suntrup *Lexicon der mittelalterlichen Zahlenbedeutungen* (Munich 1987) 565–6, 769, 774–5.

33 2 Kings/2 Sam 6:14

34 'at anyone they met': Added in the second edition. The description reflects ancient ideas on the origins of tragedy and comedy: see Horace *Ars poetica* 275–7; Donatus *De comoedia* 5.6–7 (a much read text in the Middle Ages and Renaissance).

prize was a he-goat – the lid fitting the pot, as they say.[35] But here the contest was among prophets, full of religious feeling and reverence, and it is for this reason that several psalms include the words 'for victory' in their headings. In apostolic times there were similar contests in Christian gatherings, when one would speak in tongues and another exercise the gift of prophecy. There was no bitter or unseemly rivalry; rather if another received some revelation, the first speaker would stop. The defeated contestant was not dissatisfied with himself, but would thank the Spirit for his willingness to use another to impart what he himself could not; while the victor was not proud, because he knew that everything was due to the action of the Holy Spirit, who distributed his gifts to each as he desired.[36] Such were the contests of song and dance held among these prophets, which we might take as an example for our better education; whether we experience hardship and are troubled by adversities, or whether our circumstances give us ease, we should do everything for the glory of God.[37] But now many Christians pray to God only in times of illness, war, or other dangers, dividing their lives so that the periods of hardship are separated off and given to God, while the happier times are dedicated to Satan. You may see people display some semblance of piety at the burials of their dear ones, but you will observe no trace of a Christian mentality at weddings, victory celebrations, or dinner parties. People think they have done quite enough to please God if they live in a slightly more austere fashion during Lent, but how riotously and irreligiously they behave just before that period! And at its conclusion how eagerly they return with the Easter celebrations to their interrupted pleasures! But the Christian's happiness should be no more without religion than his sorrow. As long as we remain in these tabernacles, we experience life's vicissitudes. There is a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to marry, and a time to refrain from marrying; a time to rejoice for children born, and a time to mourn for children dead[38] – but for Christians, there should be no time lacking in piety. Before a festival let us observe a fast, but in a religious spirit; and while the festival itself calls for rejoicing, let our exultation be spiritual. In the first case our affliction should be in accordance with God's command, and in the second our rejoicing should

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35 *Adagia* I x 72: *Dignum patella operculum*. The description of the festival derives from Horace *Ars poetica* 275–7.

36 Cf 1 Cor 12:11.

37 Cf 1 Cor 10:31.

38 Cf Eccles 3:1–8.

be before the Lord, as Isaiah says in chapter 9, speaking of the joys contained in the gospel: 'They shall rejoice before you as those who rejoice at the harvest.'[39] Those rejoice well who rejoice before the Lord, and with a pure conscience offer him thanks for good and bad fortune alike. Those, on the other hand, who spend their periods of good fortune indulging in gambling, drunkenness, obscene talk, and fornication, may rejoice and be happy before the world; before God they are insane. But I have perhaps dwelt on this topic at rather too great length; I could wish there were no cause for me to do so.

Let me now explain the mystical sense of the heading.[40] The Eighth Psalm is attributed in the title to David, a name which means in Hebrew 'strong of hand';[41] the Eightieth to Asaph, meaning 'he who gathers together'; and the Eighty-third, with which we are here concerned, to the sons of Korah, that is, of Calvary. The hidden sense of all these names points to Christ. He created man as an upright being (since it was through the Son that the Father created all things in heaven and on earth). Only an almighty being could do this; hence Paul in his letter to the Hebrews calls the Son 'Word of his Father's power.'[42] Again, after the Fall, when man had reached such a depth as to be comparable to brute beasts, being indistinguishable from them or even worse, he gathered him together through the Law, and placed him as it were within its bounds until the time should be fulfilled.[43] Hence the word 'synagogue';[44] hence also this psalm of Asaph rebukes the people and calls on them to observe the Law: 'Israel, if you will listen to me, there will be no strange god among you.'[45] Finally, our Lord himself proclaims in the Gospel that it is he who gathers us together: 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, and stone those who are sent to you, how often I wished to gather you together, as a hen gathers her chickens

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39 Isa 9:3

40 Pseudo-Jerome *Breviarium in psalmos* PL 26 (1845) 1070 is the source for the grouping and the meaning of the names (the latter is also discussed in Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 794, 813, 823–4). However, Erasmus seems to differ in his interpretation of 'sons of Korah,' taking it to mean Christ; Pseudo-Jerome, reading the phrase as 'sons of resurrection,' apparently interprets it as Christians, not Christ himself.

41 This interpretation is alluded to repeatedly in the psalm commentaries; see *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 14 and n11.

42 Heb 1:3

43 Cf Gal 4:4.

44 'Synagogue' in Greek means an assembly.

45 Ps 80:9–10/81:8–9

under her wings, and you would not!'[46] But in the fullness of time[47] he was made son of Korah, and hanging on the cross on the hill of Calvary he gathered the whole world to him,[48] and there rising again he vanquished Satan and staged his triumph.

At this point the reader may be disturbed and wonder how Christ, the Son of God, can be called 'son of Korah,' when Korah, although one of the chief Levites, desired to attain the high priesthood, and together with Dathan and Abiram aroused almost the whole people against Moses and Aaron. This episode is related in Numbers 16. All who adhered obstinately to him perished; the earth gaped open and swallowed some, while others were consumed with fire from heaven. But there is no absurdity in the allegory. Christ took his fleshly origin from the Jewish race, which was persistently rebellious against God, who laments through the prophet Isaiah: 'I have held out my hands all day to a people that believes not in me, and speaks against me.'[49] Again, in the Psalms: 'For forty years I have been close to this people, and I have always said, they stray in their heart.'[50] Stephen, too, in the Acts of the Apostles, rebukes them for this stubborn rebelliousness: 'You stand always against the Holy Spirit.'[51] Now the headings of several psalms contain the words 'the sons of Korah,' with no personal names, as though to be called sons of Korah were sufficient honour to these men.[52] But in the common view it would be a matter for shame to be called by the name of an evil father, one who is condemned as a horrific example. Who could bear to be called son or grandson of Judas the traitor? But Scripture marks out Korah's descendants for praise, calling them by their father's name. His impiety throws his sons' piety into relief; though they were attached by the closest of natural bonds to the instigator of the revolt, their love of religion overcame their natural feelings. One may guess with some degree of probability that on hearing Moses they abandoned their foolishness and left their father. Or perhaps they remained with him, but withheld their consent from his wicked plan; and so when he was swallowed up with his followers, his sons were saved, as we read in Numbers 26. Their father's crime did not cause them to be barred from service in the tabernacle; they

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46 Matt 23:37
47 Gal 4:4
48 Cf John 12:32–3.
49 Isa 65:2
50 Ps 94/95:10
51 Acts 7:51
52 As well as Ps 83/84, see Pss 41/42, 43/44 to 48/49, 84/85, 86/87, 87/88.

performed an honourable function as doorkeepers (1 Chronicles 26), and they also excelled in prophetic gifts. God does not, then, attribute the fathers' sins to the sons, unless they imitate them; so that the masses act unjustly in reproaching children with their ancestors' crimes and punishment, exactly as if the children themselves had been guilty. People say 'How do you dare open your mouth when your father was convicted of fraud and put to death for it? How do you dare show yourself in society?' And yet it is more worthy of praise when virtuous descendants emerge from evil stock than when the good are born of the good. Still, it is even more unjust when people hold against others not the crimes of their parents but their station in life or their misfortunes. 'His father was a slave,' they say, or 'I saw his father begging for his bread.' The people who say this still forgive themselves for their devotion to evil ways and their engagement in the basest of all services, that of Satan, and for acquiring their wealth by wronging the poor. There is nothing to be ashamed of in having a servant as father, but to be oneself the servant of lust, avarice, and every other vice is shameful above all things. No shame attaches to begging for one's bread if it is forced on one by lack of means, but to refuse the necessities of life to the needy and to live from what one can take is a crime entirely worthy of reproach. And yet the same people who forgive themselves their own very real sins condemn their neighbours for suffering the misfortunes of external circumstances. How much milder is God towards us, not even reckoning our own sins to our account when once we have repented of them. What more hideous crime, what more frightful punishment, can one imagine than that of Korah? And this was not a case of human judgment, which is fallible, but of divine. Nevertheless, the prophet in this passage chose to honour Korah's sons by referring to them with their father's name rather than their own. Again, we insult those people of Jewish descent who have converted from their parents' impiety to true religion, calling them Marаños.[53] This is equally lacking in humanity; they should rather receive greater honour because of their conversion. Supposing it is right that descendants should be tainted with the faults of their forebears: what then of our descent? Do we not spring from those who scorned the true God and worshipped wood and stone, and who shed the blood of the martyrs?

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53 This was the name given to the Jews of Spain who had chosen to convert to Christianity in order to escape mounting hostility and, from 1492, expulsion from the country; their conversion was therefore somewhat suspect. Compare Erasmus' own negative suggestions with regard to them, but also his respect for genuine converts from Judaism, in Ep 549.

But to return to the matter at hand. Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On attempted to divide the tabernacle, just as heretics and schismatics have always tried to tear apart the church. But as those men experienced the immediate and furious anger of God, so it is certain that the fire of Gehenna awaits those who when warned refuse to leave their impious sects and abandon their subversive enterprises. In a similar situation we ought all to be sons of Korah. Son should not adhere to father against the demands of religion, nor brother to brother, wife to husband, father-in-law to son-in-law;[54] but they should separate themselves from the tabernacles of the wicked, if not in flesh, then certainly by dissenting in spirit. If through thoughtlessness or negligence we absorb some error, let us listen to Moses, and 'once we are warned, let us follow a better path.'[55] Then we may hope, when this life's labours are completed, to drink the wine of eternal joy in the mountain of the Lord,[56] and if we live together in harmony in the tabernacle of God, which is the church, to be received into the heavenly tabernacle of the church triumphant.

I see that I have spent rather longer than I had intended on my exposition of the heading, so I will now move on to the psalm itself.

'How delightful are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.' The abrupt opening of the psalm expresses the soul's helpless longing; similar is the beginning of Psalm 72: 'Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.' Augustine's version, 'how lovely [*amabilia*]' (like the Greek ἀγαπητά), is more appropriate;[57] nothing is more beautiful, nothing more worthy of love, nothing more sure or safe than the agreement of the good in what is good, while nothing is more shocking, more horrible, or more uncertain than the union of the evil for evil ends. For the wicked also have their tabernacles, mentioned both in this psalm and in the preceding one: 'For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against you – the tabernacles of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagarenes; Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre.'[58] Again, in the second psalm we read: 'The rulers have taken counsel together, against the Lord and against his anointed.'[59]

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54 Cf Matt 10:34.
55 Virgil *Aeneid* 3.188
56 Cf Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25.
57 PL 37 1059, where Erasmus' edition indeed reads *amabilia*, but all manuscripts used by modern editors have *dilectissima*.
58 Ps 82/83:6–8
59 Ps 2:2

Now the church is one, and yet Paul says 'So I ordain in all the churches.'[60] He was aware that the church is many, in that it includes different places and people, but that it is one in the faith it professes and the sacraments it shares. In the same way we read of many tabernacles of God, although in reality there is a single tabernacle which includes all the chosen, since all are as one in Christ. The impious, on the other hand, being in disagreement in the articles and practice of their religion, have no common tabernacle; their disagreements with one another, however, are such that, while the names and forms they use are different, they still stand apart with equal impiety from the tabernacle of God. The Greeks and Romans might mock the Egyptians for assigning divine honours to Serapis in bull form, to monkeys, and even to the onion,[61] but they themselves all the while adored wood and stone, or spirits hidden within them, as the true god. So it was that the Spartans maintained their own tabernacles, distinct from those of the Asians. And Gaul, too, had its Druids – officials of their native cults, but opposed to true religion. Dathan, Abiram, and On were archetypes of such men. Each stood in his own tabernacle, ready for the fight; divided among themselves, they were united in their determination to defeat Moses, just as other races, though their religions were at variance one with another, still showed extraordinary unanimity and single-mindedness[62] in their persecution of the Jews – and later, still greater cooperation in persecuting the Christians. But the disunion of heretics is represented by Korah, who did not physically depart from the tabernacle of God, though in spirit he could not have been further removed from it. Heretics generally strive to appear as proponents of the true religion; and Korah's attempt to remove Aaron from the priesthood is paralleled by the attempts of heretics to persuade others that those who cling to catholic doctrine are tyrants and enemies of the church. The leaders of every heresy cry out 'Christ is with us,

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60 1 Cor 7:17

61 Cf Juvenal 15.1–13. 'Serapis' is an error for 'Apis,' the name of the divine bull at Memphis (Herodotus 3.28); the cult of Serapis or Sarapis, popular in the Graeco-Roman world, may have originated here, but the god was not represented as a bull.

62 *Syncretismus*: this referred originally to the alliance between the normally hostile Cretan cities against non-Cretans. Erasmus popularized its usage in other contexts, particularly as here the religious, and this was taken up by the Reformers. (Its modern meaning is a further development of this religious application.) Cf *Adagia* I i 11: *Syncretismus*; and see P. Gerlitz, 'Συγκρητίζειν und συγκρητισμός' in *Perennitas*: *Studi in onore di Angelo Brelich* (Rome 1980) 185–207.

not with you,' as Korah's followers said 'all the congregation is holy, and the Lord is among them.'[63] Among the Jews, before the coming of the Redeemer, the Sadducees and the Herodians had their own tabernacles, which were very far from lovely or fair-seeming.[64] But later, when the light of the gospel was being spread throughout the world, a whole multitude of abominable heretical tabernacles was pitched against the tabernacle of God. Everyone must shudder with horror if he so much as reads of the disgusting scenes which were enacted in the tabernacles of the Ophites, who worshipped, instead of Christ, a snake, or of the Cainites, who revered Cain, the shedder of kindred blood, and Judas, the traitor, among their greatest saints! Then there were the Nicolaitans, who held their wives in common, and the Adamians, who with their womenfolk came naked to worship on the grounds that, while outside Eden, they were copying Adam and Eve in their state of innocence – yet they nonetheless rejected marriage! Monstrous beliefs prevailed and rites of appalling baseness were performed in the tabernacles of Basilides, Colarbasus, Priscilla, and Marcion. As for the vile mysteries of the Manichees, it is impossible to review or read about them without nausea. The blasphemous assemblies of the Sabellians, Arians, and Eunomians against Christ, or rather against the Trinity, are universally condemned; they spared no deceit, no craft, and no cruelty in their aim of overthrowing the truth of the Catholic religion.[65]

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63 Num 16:3

64 The Sadducees were a Jewish group regarded as heterodox for their rejection of belief in angels and in life after death; hence the question put to Jesus at Matt 22:23–8, Mark 12:18–23, and Luke 20:27–33. The Herodians, also mentioned in the New Testament (Matt 22:16; Mark 3:6, 12:13), were presumably a more political group favouring Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee.

65 Here Erasmus fleshes out his picture of the loveliness of the church and the hideousness of groups outside it by referring to some early heretical groups. Despite its polemical tone, the passage is basically irenic in intent, since virtually all contemporary Christians could agree to recoil in horror at what is described here. The beliefs and practices of such sects are known largely from orthodox sources, which may well be unreliable evidence. The groups mentioned by Erasmus fall into roughly three categories: those who regarded the God of the Old Testament as flawed or evil, those who claimed not to be bound by traditional, especially sexual, morality, and those who diverged from eventual orthodoxy on the matter of the Trinity. Thus the Ophites were said to have believed in an evil creator, a serpent as liberator and illuminator, and a trinity whose union produced Christ, while the Cainites were a second-century group alleged to revere Cain and other biblical 'villains.' The Nicolaitans were an early Gnostic group who apparently used sex to demonstrate their supe-

At this point it may be worthwhile to relate a couple of their plots, so that the reader may gain some impression of the quantity of evil contained in those tabernacles.'[66] They could not get the better of Athanasius, that undefeated champion of the Catholic truth, by the use of Scripture and reasoned argument, so they decided to discredit him with trumped-up accusations. They used malicious rumours to incite Constantius,[67] who was then Caesar, against this man of holy life, and Constantius assembled a council at Tyre and ordered a trial of Athanasius, sending one of his principal deputies to preside over it. There were two main charges against Athanasius: that he had raped a woman, and that he had cut off a dead man's hand for use in sorcery. It was easy enough to suborn some woman to act her part in this drama, but to prove the charge of magic they had recourse to one Arsenius, formerly reader to Athanasius; he had wronged Athanasius, and then run away in fear of his reproof. He had been kept hidden

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riority to the things of the flesh; the name was applied to sexually immoral or married clergy in the middle ages. The Adamites, a second/third-century North African sect, claimed to be restored to primitive innocence by the practice of nudity, and hence not to be bound by morality. Basilides and Colarbasus were Gnostic thinkers: the first was a second-century Alexandrian figure who taught the typical Gnostic dogmas of the essential evil of the material world, and the distinction between the Supreme Being and the God of the Old Testament; Colarbasus was apparently a follower of the better-known Valentinus. Priscilla along with Montanus himself was one of the chief prophets of Montanism, on which see n72 below. Marcion, in the second century, was another thinker who wished to downgrade the Old Testament God, believing that Christianity had been corrupted by Judaism; Manichaeism, also a dualistic system, was or claimed to be a synthesis of Christianity with Zoroastrianism and other Persian elements. The final three heresies Erasmus mentions concern the nature of the Trinity, moving from a moderate to a more pronounced divergence from the orthodox position. The Sabellians believed that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit could be explained as the same 'person' manifest in different energies or modes, while the Arians denied that Christ was of the same substance as the Father, inasmuch as he was a created being. The Eunomians took this further, claiming that the whole idea of the Trinity was an impossibility, God being 'absolutely simple.'

66 The narrative which follows is taken from Rufinus of Aquileia *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17 PL 21 488C–91A. The account is of dubious authenticity, however; Athanasius himself gives the charges as the murder of Arsenius, with the amputation of his hand (refuted more or less as here described), and the breaking of a communion cup – not a rape (*Apologia contra Arianos* PG 25 365–9).

67 Constantius II (d 361), third son of Constantine I, whom he succeeded as Emperor of the East in 337

for some days by the Arians, to lend credibility to their story that he was dead. But when he realized the nature of the plot against Athanasius, he either baulked at the enormity of the crime, or else saw an opportunity to return to the good graces of his bishop. He left his hiding place secretly at night, and sailed to Athanasius at Tyre, where he told him the whole story. Athanasius was as outstanding in intelligence as in piety, combining the innocence of the dove with the wisdom of the serpent, as the Lord commands.[68] He told Arsenius to remain hidden until he was summoned. The council assembled, the woman came forward; then – a dreadful sight! – a coffin was brought in, with an amputated human hand placed on it. Even honest people were filled with horror, for who could believe that such evidence had been forged by priests? Then the woman related her story as she had been instructed: how she had once given hospitality to Athanasius, and how in the night, while she feared nothing from him, he had raped her. Athanasius was brought in to answer the charge. He was aware that the woman did not know him even by sight, and with his customary quick intelligence he told his presbyter Timothy to reply to the woman, while he himself remained silent. The woman finished her accusation, and Timothy said to her: 'So you claim it was I who raped you?' She replied, with a woman's own insistence: 'Yes, it was you – you violated my chastity exactly where and when I said.' The easy detection of this false charge caused blushes; but Athanasius was not acquitted, nor the woman called to justice for laying false information – at this trial prosecution and presiding magistrates were the same. They now turned to the second charge. 'This affair speaks for itself,' they said. 'This is the hand of Arsenius: now tell us, Athanasius, for what purpose you severed it from his body.' Athanasius was a prudent man, and his alertness did not desert him on this second occasion. He asked whether they would recognize Arsenius, the owner of the hand, and some of them replied that they knew his features well. Then he asked permission to call a witness whose testimony was essential to his case; the request was granted, and Arsenius was led in. His face was uncovered, and Athanasius said: 'Here is Arsenius alive, with both his hands intact. Now perhaps you should tell us where you got hold of that severed hand.'

You will perhaps suppose that at this stage Athanasius was dismissed with no charge against him. Far from it! This righteous man would have been torn apart bodily by his enemies, had not Archelaus,[69] Count of the

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68 Matt 10:16

69 Although the historicity of the incident is somewhat doubtful, along with Rufinus' chronology, Archelaus was *comes orientis* in the mid-fourth century,

Orient and one of the presidents of the council, managed to get him out of their hands and send him away by a secret route. When all the evidence was against them, it was impossible for his enemies to produce any sophistries in reply; they simply kept shouting that Athanasius was a magician who deceived people's vision with his tricks, and that the master of such conceits should by no means be allowed to live. The council was reconvened, and Athanasius was sentenced as though he had been found guilty by due process of law. An appalling announcement spread throughout the whole empire: by an edict of the imperial prefects this man truly worthy of heaven was to be sought out by land and sea in all places of concealment; there were even rewards promised for his capture, alive if possible, but otherwise to whomever could bring back his head. The Jews never worked such machinations against Christ; it is impossible to think of a more heinous crime committed even in pagan society. That is a small sample from the tabernacles of heretics and schismatics.

I could relate much of the insane cruelty of the Circumcellions, or of the Donatists' cunning deceit and violence, with which readers of Augustine's works on such subjects will be familiar.[70] But all this belongs to the distant past. What is worse is that within our own lifetime groups were discovered which would meet at night to sing hymns to God – then the lights would be put out, and men and women would indulge together in promiscuous sex.[71] But that is nothing compared to the sects where mothers willingly handed over their own children to be killed and watched the horrendous deed quite cheerfully, believing that those killed in this way would be numbered among the greatest saints. This madness appears to have its origin in the heresy known as Phrygian.[72] The adherents of this sect used

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occupying a high-ranking position in the late Roman Empire: see *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* ed A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, J. Morris 3 vols (Cambridge 1970–92) I 100 'Archelaus 1.'

70 The Donatists were moral rigorists, believing that the church must exclude all those guilty of mortal sin, and that sacraments administered by 'betrayers' in the persecutions were invalid. The Circumcellions were violent groups attached to the Donatist church. PL 43 contains Augustine's anti-Donatist works, such as *Contra Gaudentium* and *Contra epistolam Parmeniani*.

71 It is unclear whether Erasmus has in mind here some particular recent scandal. In northern Europe allegations of sexual promiscuity were made against the brethren of the Free Spirit who in a number of ways anticipate Anabaptism; their radical dualism resurfaces in Antwerp in the 1520s. See R.E. Lerner *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Berkeley 1972).

72 Or more commonly as Montanism. Erasmus' horror story is taken almost verbatim from Augustine *De haeresibus* PL 42 30.

to make the eucharistic host from flour moistened with the blood of a small child. For this purpose they made tiny pinpricks in the child's body, and if he happened to die, he was venerated as a martyr. You see what horrific practices people slide into when once they leave the tabernacle of God and become servants in the tabernacles of the wicked.

Now if you compare a beautiful girl with an ugly old hag, the comparison makes the girl seem more attractive and the old woman more repulsive. So here the psalmist, with his prophetic and spiritual vision, compares the synagogues of Satan[73] with the tabernacle of God, where heavenly truth is supreme, where there is abundance of the peace which passes all understanding,[74] where charity is warm and unfeigned and faith unvanquished celebrates its triumph, where with one voice and one mind all sing God's praises; and he exclaims all the louder 'How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.' For the agreement of the devout gives us a picture of that heavenly church which has no difference of opinion. Already they see the glory of the Lord not in riddles but with his face made plain.[75] In perfect concord of mind and perfect love they hymn God with one voice and one accord. Let us remember too that the spirit's eye, made perceptive by the light of faith, sees more than the eye of the body. What more then does it see? It sees Christ sitting in the midst of his own, blessing those gathered around him; for as he said in the Gospel, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'[76] It sees great crowds of angels, protectors and servants of the holy congregation, constantly moving about in great reverence. How different is everything in the tabernacles of the wicked! There Satan presides, never more dangerous than when he 'takes on the form of an angel of light';[77] there around him are evil spirits, prompting men to all sorts of wickedness. It is scarcely necessary to speak of the very different ends in store in the two cases – all are aware of the fate of Korah and his fellow conspirators. It was indeed frightful to behold when the earth gaped open and swallowed them alive, or when many thousands were consumed by a thunderbolt, or by fire sent from heaven – for the next day the people's rebellious temper reasserted itself, and fourteen thousand perished in fire from heaven. However, it is still more frightful when a soul and body together are sent to hell.[78]

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73 Rev 2:9
74 Phil 4:7
75 Cf 1 Cor 13:12.
76 Matt 18:20
77 2 Cor 11:14
78 Cf Matt 10:28.

There is a measure of truth in what some say, that the church is invisible.[79] Only God can see into human hearts[80] and know for certain which are his own. But often we find that there are various methods which can be used to determine where we may find God's church, and where the synagogues of Satan; for the sins of many 'run before them to judgment.'[81] But even this visible church, containing as it does wrongdoers together with the good, gives an extraordinarily imposing impression of zeal whenever it assembles for the ritual expression of devotion. One man, endowed with the gift of prophecy, will in good faith dispense and expound God's word, while the people will listen attentively and reverently, as to the word of God, not that of a human being, since the man engaged in the exposition is so altered that you are aware of Christ's spirit speaking through a human mouth. At the same time you can see the Spirit's action[82] at work among the hearers; some sigh, some burst into tears, while the faces of others grow radiant with joy – in short, you would say they were all transformed. Again, take the celebration of the mass: here each performs his own task, one reading from the Holy Scriptures, one chanting praises to God, while another prays in the name of the whole people and handles the mysteries,[83] and others stand by to assist him; and the people meanwhile witness all this in strict and reverent silence. Everyone who sees this must agree that the tabernacles of God are lovely indeed. Similarly, when the church's solemn

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79 Formulated from an orthodox (anti-Donatist) position, as expressed by Augustine in *De baptismo* PL 43 196: 'Many who appear to be outside [the church] are inside, and many who seem to be inside are outside'; only God knows who are his own. Applied to the contemporary situation, the point has an obvious irenic intent. See n170 below.

80 Cf Rom 8:27.

81 1 Tim 5:24

82 'action' (*energia*): Erasmus also uses *energia* of the Spirit at, for instance, *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-4 68:670. The Greek word is used in several places in the Pauline epistles (eg Eph 4:16; Col 1:29) to denote God's direct action on the minds and bodies of individuals.

83 'handles the mysteries' (*tractat mysteria*): In choosing this phrase Erasmus may perhaps be deliberately ambiguous in the interests of inclusiveness. On the other hand, the phrase may refer to the performance of the sacred rites, ie the eucharistic consecration (an action Erasmus usually expresses by the verb *sacrificare*), a reading that fits with the mention of those who 'stand by to assist him' and suits the order of events given. But Erasmus frequently uses *mysteria* to refer to the Scriptures, in which case *tractat* must mean expounding the Scriptures, thus referring to preaching. In this way the whole description is capable of a divergence in emphasis. On the passage see Chomarat II 703.

supplications are performed in a dignified and properly ordered manner, even those present merely as observers are moved by a sort of awe and enthusiasm. In fact, any group of people lawfully assembled for an honest purpose, such as a gathering of students taking their graduation oath, or of all sorts of people for a public disputation, has some kind of dignity, even joyfulness. When Alcibiades was about to make his first speech in the Athenian assembly, he felt hesitant and nervous. He was relieved of his fear by Socrates, who asked him whether he could feel superior to a tanner. 'Of course,' he replied. 'Or a potter?' asked Socrates, and he replied, 'Easily.' 'Or a smith, or a stonecutter?' Socrates continued. So, questioned about all these separately, Alcibiades replied that he could speak calmly in front of any of them. Then Socrates said: 'But the assembly which you are so afraid of is composed of these.'[84] So if the mere fact of being gathered together lends dignity and awesomeness to people who may easily be disregarded on their own account, how much more worthy of reverence is the assembly of the pious, gathered together to worship the living God! A group of those who are united in their trust of God has power to cause even non-believers to marvel. Paul declares that if anyone who was either ignorant of the faith or a non-believer entered the church of the saints, he would fall prostrate and worship God, declaring that in truth God was there in the midst of his own.[85] When Balaam, who though a prophet was not a pious man, saw from the mountain top the tabernacles of the Israelites, he was compelled to burst out: 'How beautiful are your tabernacles, O Jacob, and your tents, O Israel.'[86] He saw how happy is the death of those who remain encamped in the church, and said: 'Let my soul die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like theirs!'[87] And when the holy prophet has glimpsed the beauty of these tabernacles, he exclaims in a song of degrees: 'Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'[88] The same was witnessed by Peter, though as in a dream,[89] when on the mountain he beheld the glory of the Lord, and heard Moses and Elijah speaking with him of his glorious death. 'Lord,' he said, 'it is good for us to be here; let us

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84 This anecdote is related also in *Apophthegmata* 8.13 LB IV 370C and seems to be elaborated from Plato *Alcibiades* 2 114B.

85 1 Cor 14:23–5, actually contrasting prophecy with speaking in tongues

86 Num 24:5

87 Num 23:10

88 Ps 132/133:1

89 Matt 17:4; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:33. Luke's account adds the detail that Peter and the others were asleep just before they saw the vision (9:32). On the significance of the phrase, see Screech 198–205.

make here three tabernacles.'[90] This is true concord, where the Law and the Prophets agree in their prophecy of Christ as 'minister of the new covenant, not by the letter but by the spirit.'[91] This is not found in the Jewish synagogues, where the law is twisted to refer not to Christ but to some other Messiah, for whom the unfortunate people have been waiting in vain all these years. Nor is it present in the tabernacles of the Manichees, who reject the whole of the Old Testament, claiming that it is the work not of God but of the prince of darkness; they also regard many passages of the New Testament as spurious, and arbitrarily pick and choose parts for approval or disapproval. Nor will you find it in any of the heretics' tabernacles, for instead of referring the Scriptures to Christ, who is the truth, they pervert the sense by giving their interpretations a purely human reference. This has always been the particular practice of heretics; in this way the Priscillianists did not reject the authority of any book in the Old or New Testament, but misinterpreted whatever was incompatible with their ridiculous doctrines, and completely distorted the sense.[92]

But to return to the words of the psalm. If by the tabernacles of God one understands the church militant on earth, one must imagine these words as spoken by a catechumen, by a pagan or Jew on the point of conversion, or by a sinner, heretic, or schismatic returning to his right mind. But if one takes the phrase to refer to that part of the church which is now triumphant with Christ, one must picture a devout man who like Paul desires to be loosed and to be with Christ,[93] saying 'How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.'

The text's abrupt beginning expresses the greatness of the longing which derives from profound contemplation. The speaker's use of the word 'your,' addressing the Lord, is not superfluous; whatever merit, strength, or blessedness is in the church is God's, not man's. He freely redeemed his church, he directs and protects it from all storms and perils; and whoever opposes the church fights not against men but against God. This he tells us plainly, speaking through Zechariah (chapter 2): 'He who shall touch you, shall touch the apple of my eye.'[94] Or take the voice heard by Paul:

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90 Matt 17:4
91 Cf 2 Cor 3:6; the discussion draws on the whole of chapter 3.
92 The Priscillianist heresy originated in the fourth century and persisted up to the sixth. It was a kind of Manichaean dualism which claimed biblical authority, often showing a preference for apocryphal texts.
93 Phil 1:23
94 Zech 2:8

'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'[95] Again, in the Gospel he declares that whatever good deed is done to even the least of those who call themselves Christians is done to him;[96] so too whatever wrong is suffered by the Catholic church he counts as a wrong to him. Since the Catholic church has such a champion and defender, all conspiracies against it are in vain. Hence the psalm continues: 'O Lord of hosts [*Domine virtutum*].' The word *virtutes* is here equivalent not to ἀρεταί – the opposite of vices – but to δυνάμεις, that is, power. This is a title often used in the Bible to designate God, as for instance in Psalm 23: 'The Lord of virtutes (δυνάμεων), he is the King of glory.' These words were preceded by 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord strong in battle.' In the books of the Old Testament we often meet the title 'Lord of Sabaoth,' which in Hebrew means 'of powers' or 'of armies,' and it is in fact the Hebrew word used in the psalm here.[97] Δυνάμεις [powers] in religious writings sometimes refers to the greatest angels, whom God employs to guard his elect. This was the army seen by Elisha, when he said to his servant, faint with fear at the sight of the Syrian army: 'Fear not; for those who are with us are more than those with them.'[98] Then in response to the prophet's prayers, his servant's eyes were opened, and he too saw the mountain filled with horses and fiery chariots. 'No one,' says Christ, 'can snatch from my hand those whom the Father has given to me,'[99] and the song of degrees concurs, saying: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it,'[100] and so on. St Paul, although the church of his day had no worldly defence, no protection in wealth or in numbers, says with immense confidence: 'If God is for us, who can be against us?'[101] And he then reaches such a degree of trust that, though the church was then suffering attack on every side, he is not afraid to say, 'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, neither angels nor principalities, neither things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'[102] How did Paul acquire such confidence, when so many deaths, so many dangers were threatening from inside and out? How did those few

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95 Acts 9:4
96 Matt 25:40
97 'and it is in fact . . . here': Added in the second edition
98 4 Kings/2 Kings 6:16
99 Cf John 10:28–9.
100 Ps 126/127:1
101 Rom 8:31
102 Rom 8:38–9

ignorant, unimportant, humble, and oppressed people acquire such a spirit? 'Of ourselves we can do nothing,' comes the reply, 'but our Lord is the Lord of powers.' Whether then one takes 'powers' [*virtutes*] to mean angels, the protectors of the church, or to mean miracles, in either case the words show that the church's Lord remains unvanquished, since he is almighty, and at his command all the legions of angels stand ready; he alone works great miracles,[103] he alone did everything that he willed, both in heaven and on earth. At its beginnings the church grew in strength by miracles, not by human agency. And since all who live a dutiful life in Jesus Christ must endure the persecution of the wicked, though they are unimportant in the world's view and small in numbers compared with their opponents, the words 'O Lord of powers' serve to hearten the 'little flock.' For it is he who says in the Gospel: 'Have no fear, little flock: for yours is the kingdom of heaven,'[104] and again: 'Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.'[105] And he alone can bind the mighty and overthrow their houses and possessions.[106] 'We were counted as sheep for the slaughter.'[107] There is no creature more feeble or less fierce than the sheep – but listen to Paul, when he had ceased to be a wolf and become a sheep. 'The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but powerful through God, to cast down strongholds and destroy counsels, and every high thing which raises itself against the knowledge of God.'[108] In the same passage he upbraids the Corinthians for their attachment to the flesh, which caused them to view things only according to appearances. Thus in using externals to judge the apostles, who were in a worldly sense not only poor and unimportant but actually destitute, they despised men exceedingly rich in spiritual wealth and excellently armed with spiritual weapons. Those whose eyes are dazzled by the might of this world judge the church of Christ by its outer appearance, and feel scorn or even aversion and hatred for it. It was this type of person who in ancient times would deliberately postpone baptism until his deathbed, and who would come to the courts of the Lord only in tears and sadness. But he who sees with the eye of the spirit the inward glory of the king's daughter says with the prophet: 'My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord.'

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103 Ps 135/136:4
104 Luke 12:32
105 John 16:33
106 Cf Mark 3:27.
107 Ps 43/44:22; Rom 8:36
108 2 Cor 10:4–5

We look forward to benefits of an ordinary sort with controlled feelings, but when it comes to those things which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, which have not been conceived by human heart,[109] our longing and expectation should be intense. It is this great longing which the prophet expresses in the words 'and faints for the courts of the Lord.' It is common enough to feel desire, but only when our desire exceeds human limits do we grow faint.[110] This phenomenon, when a sudden and violent emotion causes a temporary loss of consciousness, is called by the Greeks λειποθυμία. The effect may sometimes be produced by extreme fear or amazement (when we call those affected 'stupefied' or 'astonished'), or it may be due to great sorrow, or joy attained beyond hope, or immoderate love. So, to use an example from secular tragedy, when Phaedra catches sight of Hippolytus, she collapses as though in death.[111] And in history we read how a woman fainted at the unhoped-for entrance of her son, whom she had thought had fallen in battle.[112] This word [*deficio*] is used in the same sense in Psalm 118: 'My soul faints for your deliverance . . . my eyes have grown faint for your promise.'[113] Also relevant here are the words of the bride in the Song of Solomon: 'Sustain me with flowers, fill me with apples, for I am faint with love.'[114] She asks for support, and so she is clearly in danger of falling. In spiritual matters, just as in outward affairs, the relation between the perceiving sense and the object which it perceives must be moderated. Otherwise, if the object perceived is exposed to the senses without restrictions, it destroys the senses. Thus if you gaze on the sun without intervening clouds, it destroys your sight, and excessive noise results in deafness. As we find in the writing of the learned, in the town of Stadissis, which is situated at the point where the Nile pours down the cataracts with an immense roaring sound, the natives are born deaf.[115] Again, we frequently observe that those who engage enthusiastically in excessively complicated research are driven out of their minds. Aristotle, we read (I cannot now discuss whether the story is true or false), spent much time exercising his ingenuity on the question of what causes the Euripus, unlike other seas, to change the direction of its flow seven times a day. When he failed to make the slightest

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109 1 Cor 2:9
110 Erasmus uses Greek words for 'feel desire' and 'grow faint.'
111 Seneca *Phaedra* 583–6
112 Livy 22.7.13
113 Ps 118/119:81–2
114 Song of Sol 2:5
115 Pliny *Natural History* 6.181

progress, he threw himself into it, saying: 'Since I cannot grasp you, you will grasp me!'[116] So it is the less surprising that people who are not content to believe what is handed down to us by Scripture, and who investigate many topics relating to the Holy Trinity which far exceed the human mind's capacity, lose their reason, and, having previously aspired to a wisdom more than human, are now devoid even of ordinary intelligence. To these men Solomon's prophecy refers: 'He who seeks out greatness will be overcome by glory';[117] similarly Isaiah: 'He makes as nothing those who pry into what is secret.'[118]

But perhaps you are now eager to hear the nature of these extraordinary good things, surpassing human understanding, which have been glimpsed by this man who so greatly desires to enter the courts of the Lord that he faints in wonder. Yet surely no one could adequately describe how precious and how blissful it is for a man, a sinner caught in the snares of Satan, to leave through faith and baptism the service of the devil and to be freely adopted among the sons of God. He is grafted onto the body of Christ, he becomes one with him, and he changes his inheritance of perdition for an inheritance of the kingdom of heaven. He joins that glorious company of all the saints who have been since the creation of the world and who will be until its end, whether in heaven or on earth. Such is the privilege, such the joy offered to the catechumens in the courts of the Lord, before they are admitted within. For the word 'court' [*atrium*] properly refers to the entrance of a noble house; whence 'servants of the court' [*servi atrienses*] for those who are in charge there. So there is nothing surprising if someone perceiving with the eyes of faith the greatness of God's house should faint at the prospect of things which are divine and which exceed human nature and, overcome by extreme emotion, lose control of his faculties. When Horace, an eloquent man, was summoned to Maecenas, he spoke little, and

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116 There is a pun on the two senses of *capio*, 'take' and 'understand.' The Euripus is the narrow channel which separates Euboea from the Greek mainland. For the sources of the story, which was popular in late antiquity and the middle ages, see I. Düring *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition* (Göteborg 1957) 347–8. The moral drawn by Erasmus has of course a bearing on the main subject of *De concordia*; if everyone remained within the consensus of the Christian community rather than indulging in overingenious speculation, there would be no heresy and less ground for division in the church.

117 Prov 25:27

118 Isa 40:23. Erasmus quotes from the Vulgate, which has a different reading from the Septuagint and the English versions.

what he did say came 'in gulps,' to quote his own words.[119] Indeed, men normally well esteemed and learned not uncommonly find that as they are about to make a speech in the midst of a large gathering of spiritual or temporal rulers, they are overcome by faintness, suddenly lose possession of themselves, and are unable to utter the words they have been polishing for months beforehand.[120] Yet what is the grandeur of such a gathering compared with the glory of the church? But the church is perceived more clearly with the eyes of faith than with those of the body, and so those who present themselves for baptism with no emotion, apparently unwillingly, have yet to realize the great happiness to be theirs, and are consequently unworthy to receive what is offered to them. Suppose that someone of low estate is rotting in a filthy prison, and a messenger arrives saying 'Be of good cheer: today as a free man you will enter the palace; you will be among the great ones of the court, and you will be dear to the king.' The prisoner would be likely to grow faint with the sudden joy, and when after the darkness of the prison he was admitted to the light and splendour of the king's dwelling place, he would be in danger of fainting altogether. But what prison or pit is so dreadful as that which holds those whom Satan has bound with the bonds of sin? Where would you find a palace fit to be compared with the splendour of the church, even if you put the magnificence of all palaces together into one? Consequently, it is right that those who receive such grace with indifference and lack of interest should be blamed; but how much more worthy of reproach are those who live a sordid and unprincipled life actually inside the palace!

I think too that the precise words used by the prophet conceal some sort of mystery. He says not 'I have grown faint,' but 'my soul has grown faint'; not 'I have rejoiced,' but 'my heart and my flesh have rejoiced.' The word 'soul' [*anima*] in biblical contexts often denotes something human and somewhat weak. Thus Paul, speaking to the Corinthians, says: 'The animal man (ψυχικός) does not receive those things which are God's.'[121] Again, James calls the wisdom of this world, which rejects faith and uses human

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119 Horace *Satires* 1.6.56

120 The point is also made with characteristic exaggeration in *Moria* ASD IV-3 98 / CWE 27 98–9, and in classical sources such as Cicero *Pro Roscio Amerino* 4.9.

121 1 Cor 2:14. Latin *animalis* translates Greek ψυχικός, 'of the soul'; the 'natural man' (Authorized Version) or 'man who is unspiritual' (New English Bible) is a person dominated by the soul rather than the spirit. Erasmus generally adopts a tripartite division of the human being into body, soul, and spirit (founded on 1 Thess 5:19–23 and developed by Origen) in which the spirit is the highest part. See Screech 96–112 especially 101–2.

reasoning to investigate what is divine, 'animal' [*animalis*, 'of the soul'].[122] Similarly, the flesh of a human being denotes something material, engaged in continuous warfare with the Spirit of God; but the word 'heart' seems to be used for the human spirit or mind, since according to physicians the source of the vital spirits is in the heart. Flesh, then, in Paul's words, 'cannot possess the kingdom of God',[123] being 'flesh, with which the Spirit of God will not consort.'[124] We should consider it the basest part of man. In the same condition is the soul which drives away the Spirit of God, as St Jude says,[125] when as it were he points the finger of reproach at those who in their pursuit of the things of this world create divisions and schisms, and remove themselves from the church. 'These are they,' he says, 'who separate themselves, being of the soul [*animales*] and possessing not the spirit.' Then there is also the human heart, into which 'have not risen those things which God has prepared for those who love him.'[126] Since, then, the whole man, with the sum of all his resources, cannot contain these heavenly gifts, what can he do but faint away and collapse completely? Then he may be renewed and restored by the Spirit of God, and through faith he may perceive the immensity of those things which God in his favour towards us has freely given us through his Son, if we approach his tabernacles worthily. In this way to lose one's senses is to recover them; to become unconscious is to receive life; to depart from oneself, to be restored to oneself; to fall, to be raised; to be deserted by one's own resources is to become strong in Christ; to die is to be transformed into God. For unless the things of the soul are put to death, the things of the spirit cannot come into being. To use analogies from natural events: the dry, unpleasant-looking seed decays so that the green tree may burst forth. The ugly caterpillar dies in order that a patterned, brightly coloured butterfly may fly out. The cicada withers away on reaching old age, so that from its dried remains may emerge a new singer, full of sap and vigour.[127] So when the whole man has fainted away – fainted in the tabernacles of God – then his flesh together with his soul and his heart rejoice 'in the living God'; the Spirit of God renews all things through faith, and the whole man becomes 'a new creation in Christ

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122 James 3:15
123 1 Cor 15:50
124 Gen 6:3, paraphrased
125 Jude 19
126 1 Cor 2:9
127 Perhaps from Pliny *Natural History* 11.35 (locusts die after giving birth).

Jesus.'[128] For this is the flesh which sees God's salvation[129] – the 'spiritual body' in Paul's words[130] – and this is the clean heart which God creates in us, and the right spirit which he renews within us.[131] It is of course in this way that there arises that spiritual delight which is not in the wealth or renown or pleasures of this world, not in physical beauty or strength, not in human wisdom, but in the living God, who gives life to the dead. As St Paul warns us, the only safe boasting is boasting in the Lord. Scripture often gives God this epithet of 'living,' partly to distinguish him from inanimate images, but also to make plain his omnipotence, since what is efficacious we call living. It is not much to believe that God is 'alive' – even brute beasts are alive – but he alone is 'living' in such a way that he is true life itself, and from him as from a spring flows universal life. 'I am the way, the truth and the life,' says our Lord.[132] So when the old man has been put to death and buried in baptism, the new man, dead on his own account but containing within him the living Christ, rejoices in all his parts and gives thanks to him whose generous bounty has thus transformed him. Sarah gave birth to Isaac – that is, spiritual joy[133] – only after she had passed the age of childbearing.[134] But who was Isaac's father? It was Abraham, dead in the flesh but full of living and flourishing faith.

But our prophet preferred to use an allegorical form to explain the cause of this joy: 'The sparrow has found a home for herself, and the turtle dove a nest where she may lay her young.' The spirit of prophecy has chosen such a simple image to express the glorious reality! Why should one so rejoice, and exult and triumph in happiness, when a little earlier one had fainted? 'Because the sparrow has found a home for herself, and the turtle dove a nest where she may lay her young.' It is a natural instinct in all animals to make for themselves a place where they can rest safely after their exertions, and they display a wonderfully ingenious variety in this.[135]

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128 Gal 6:15; cf 2 Cor 5:17.
129 Cf Job 19:26.
130 1 Cor 15:44
131 Ps 50:12/51:10
132 John 14:6
133 According to Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 780, 'Isaac' means 'laughter' or 'joy.'
134 Gen 17:19, 18:11ff. The phrase used by Erasmus is *defecerant illi muliebria*, containing the same verb which is used in the psalm and in the foregoing discussion to mean 'faint.'
135 Some of the following material is from Pliny's *Natural History* 10.4–51.

Many animals, such as deer, withdraw to areas which are remote and difficult of access, and can only with difficulty be traversed by hunters. Boars hide among bushes, lions and snakes in caves. The hare has an extraordinary habit of leaping off in the direction opposite to its lair, thus deceiving the hunter to prevent him from finding it out. Snakes find safety in recesses, rabbits protect themselves in underground warrens. Ants hide the winter through in the hollows which they have excavated. Bees construct their cells in the hollows of trees, covering them with a layer of bitter sticky substance to protect themselves from injury. Fish, too, have their own lairs and hiding places. Most birds retire to forests or marshy areas; eagles make their nests on cliffs, while the partridge nests on the ground. Kingfishers float their nests on the sea; they are so skilfully constructed that not even metal can cut through them, and no one has yet discovered from what material they construct their tiny floating home. Other birds ingeniously collect twigs and shoots, and make their nests in chimneys or high up in trees. Sparrows and swallows have actually taught us how to make brick walls by mixing damp clay with straw. In fact – for I must avoid excessive length in enumerating individual examples – every animal, once it has found a place where it can rest in safety and bring up its young, has attained its desire and wishes for nothing further. It possesses the natural instincts of self-protection and reproduction.

But it may be asked why, out of all species of animals, only birds are mentioned, and of these only the sparrow and the turtle dove. Of all kinds of animals birds are the smallest and least significant. The earth has elephants, the sea has whales, both creatures of exceptional size. And the sparrow is the smallest of birds; our Lord's words remind us of its small price and its life free of worries.[136] But the Holy Spirit has no affection for souls which are puffed up with pride, and weighed down with love of bodily pleasures, and so plodding along on the ground. The Spirit loves souls capable of flight, which enjoy fellowship with heaven,[137] those who are insignificant in their own eyes, of no account to the world, and who depend wholly on God's providence. If God thus clothes and feeds the sparrows which are sold at two for a penny, why do you torment yourself piling up riches, licitly and illicitly, for your old age – which you may never reach – and for your children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, when perhaps all your wealth may end up with those you would least like? Not one of these sparrows falls to the ground, which as some writers relate happens

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136 Matt 10:29

137 The phraseology recalls Ovid *Ars amatoria* 3.549.

on occasion as a result of excessive sexual activity.[138] But you are a member of that flock of which our Saviour declared that not a hair of their heads should perish without the Father's foresight;[139] why then do you dash off to astrologers and fortune-tellers, in a panic lest you die before your appointed time?

The turtle dove is like the pigeon in that it sighs rather than sings, and it is ignorant of adultery, or even of a second marriage, for it is said that after its mate's death it will not consort with any other.[140] This is the reason why the bride in the mystical Song of Solomon finds its voice so pleasing: 'The voice of the turtle is heard in our land.' Despite the fact that the spring songs of larks and nightingales are far more melodious, the bride delights in the sighing of the turtle dove. All those who have little regard for this world, hoping for the life of heaven, 'groan and are oppressed, as long as they sojourn in this tabernacle' which is the body; because, says the Apostle, they 'do not wish to be unclothed, but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.'[141] Further, under the old dispensation the turtle dove was the offering made by the poor, so that like the sparrow it is of small value. The man who sincerely recognizes that in himself there is nothing good should then attribute little value to himself. What is more sublime than Paul? Yet he speaks as a tiny sparrow when he calls himself of monstrous birth, the least of the apostles, wholly unworthy of the name of apostle, and even as rubbish, the offscourings of this world.[142] But this low value is the one thing which gives us value in the eyes of God; this insignificance renders us great and exalted before the upright judge. Do you want to hear the greatness of this tiny sparrow? These are his words: 'I can do all things in him who gives me strength.'[143] Does it not seem that the sparrow or turtle dove has been changed into a lion? The judgments of God and the judgments of this world are completely opposed, and as the world loves and fosters those who are of the world, so also it loathes and despises those who are not of the world. 'They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, tormented; wandering in deserts, in mountains,

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138 Ancient authors often speak of sparrows as highly sexed, eg Pliny *Natural History* 10.52.107.

139 Matt 10:30

140 Both turtle dove and pigeon are said to include a 'groan' (*gemitus*) at the end of their song (Pliny *Natural History* 10.106.2); for the dove's ignorance of adultery, see ibidem 10.104.

141 2 Cor 5:4

142 1 Cor 15:8–9, 4:13

143 Phil 4:13

and in caves and hollows in the earth.'[144] What station could be lower? Yet hear their worth: 'Of whom,' it continues, 'the world was not worthy.' What, in the world's view, could be more contemptible than Paul, who calls himself *peripsema* (that is, dirt washed off and thrown away)? But in the same measure as he was despised by the world, he was precious to Christ, who proclaims him as his chosen vessel.[145] There is no need to mention the other saints, when the Lord of glory himself says, speaking in the person of David, 'I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people.'[146] Yet he who was most scorned by the world is the same at whose name every knee bows,[147] in heaven, earth, and hell, and who shares equally in the glory of God the Father. Consequently, no one who leads a pious life should be dissatisfied with himself if he is scorned and hated by those who have imbibed the spirit of this world. Of course, we must strive wholeheartedly to give no cause for offence to anyone; but nonetheless, if through no fault of our own we are rejected by the world, it is very likely that we enjoy favour with Christ. When I speak of 'the world,' I am not talking in terms of monastic profession, of clothes or diet or title; I mean a mind which is empty of the spirit of Christ. People generally misuse this word – as so many others – calling those who are not ordained or who have not entered a monastic order 'of the world,' while those who have done so they call 'outside the world' or 'dead to the world.' But just as clerical dress, regardless of how mean or how splendid[148] it may be, may conceal a mind devoted to the world, so the dress of a layman, even a soldier, may conceal a disposition removed from the world, even if he sports an ostrich feather in a slashed hat.

Meanwhile, perhaps it may occur to some to wonder how it is that suddenly, from that great exultation of the whole man, we have slipped into a reference to sighs: 'from lime-kiln to charcoal furnace,' as they say.[149] These two states may seem to be opposed to each other, but for as long as we sojourn in this mortal tabernacle, bearing heavenly treasure in earthen vessels,[150] they are so closely connected that they cannot be separated from each other, and what is more, each in turn derives from the other. For us

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144 Heb 11:37–8
145 Acts 9:15
146 Ps 21:7/22:6
147 Phil 2:10
148 Erasmus uses the Greek word ἱεροπρεπής, literally 'fitting for sacred ritual,' 'solemn and impressive.'
149 *Adagia* II iv 96: *De calcaria in carbonariam*
150 2 Cor 4:7

who walk in faith,[151] the whole of our joy is contained in the hope of the good things to come. The more clearly we perceive these with the eye of faith, and the more conviction there is in our hope, the greater are our sighs, just as anyone who desires anything greatly finds all delay irksome. Again, the more we sigh in longing for that life, the more our heart and flesh rejoice in the living God; we receive sorrow from the world and comfort from Christ. Here, there is nothing complete, barely anything certain. We know in part and prophesy in part;[152] and he who stands must take care lest he fall.[153] We walk in the midst of snares, and it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to escape from all of them. The troubles which this life brings with it have not indeed the power to snatch us from the love which is in Christ Jesus,[154] but they do frequently draw us away from that spiritual exultation of mind of which we have been speaking, and cause us to cry out with longing for that day when perfection will be reached. Who indeed, enduring such an exile, would not sigh for such a native land? If you wish to hear these sighs of the turtle dove, read Psalm 119: 'Woe is me, that my sojourn is prolonged, and I have lived with the inhabitants of Kedar. My soul has long been a sojourner.' 'Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, and from a deceitful tongue.'[155] A great part of the troubles of the pious lies in the endurance of the tongues and the ways of the wicked. The passage from Ecclesiastes is relevant here: 'He who increases knowledge increases sorrow, and in much wisdom is much grief.'[156] The sun's light is common to all; not so the light of faith. *Kedar* in Hebrew means 'darkness,'[157] and all the projects undertaken by those who have the spirit of this world are utter darkness, for they hate the light of truth and rather love the dark. But although there is perhaps even more difference between a spiritual person enlightened by faith and a carnal person who is devoid of faith, the pious are still compelled during this journey through life to share cities and homes with such completely different souls. Thus Lot, while he dwelt in Sodom, endured mental torture, longing to be snatched from the company of the wicked.[158] Yet though a while ago you heard the dove sighing

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151 2 Cor 5:7
152 1 Cor 13:9
153 Cf 1 Cor 10:12
154 A reminiscence of Rom 8:38–9
155 Ps 119/120:5, 2
156 Eccles 1:18
157 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 827 ('darkness or sorrow')
158 Genesis 19

deeply and exclaiming 'Woe is me, that my sojourn is prolonged,' you may now hear the same bird rejoicing in hope of the promised happiness: 'I was glad when they said unto me: We will go into the house of the Lord.'[159] Listen to another dove of distinction, groaning deeply: 'Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?'[160] And now listen to him, too, as he rejoices: 'I am filled with comfort, I am overjoyed in all our affliction.'[161]

We may observe that these sighs have always been deepest in men[162] who aspire to the blessed state of heaven. This explains the retirement of the prophets into the wilderness.[163] It explains the long ranks of those who in the years after Christ's passion were unable to endure the cruelty and impiety of idolaters, and made their dwellings in the deserts around Egyptian Thebes. It explains the original genesis of monasticism; monks were those who preferred the society of lions and panthers to that of wicked men. Some, such as St Jerome, withdrew to the deserts of Syria. Others took themselves off to uninhabited islands, while still others, like St Benedict, occupied almost inaccessible mountain peaks. Some, again, such as Patrick or Bernard, sought out wild marshes, uninhabitable by virtually all animals; others looked for rocky landscapes dreadful even to look at, as did Bruno, or whoever was in truth the founder of the Carthusian order.[164]

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159 Ps 121/122:1

160 Rom 7:24

161 2 Cor 7:2

162 'men' (*viris*): a word of commendation; see n230.

163 This sentence was added in the second edition, along with 'in the years after Christ's passion' in the following sentence.

164 The first people referred to are the so-called Desert Fathers, such as St Antony of Egypt (d 356), who retired to the desert to live a life of extreme austerity. Jerome lived as a hermit in the Syrian desert before returning to Antioch, where he was ordained priest. St Benedict (c 480–c 550), the most influential figure in early western monasticism, lived as a monk for some fifty years, first at Subiaco, then at Monte Cassino – both mountainous places. The reference to St Patrick (c 389—c 461), the evangelist of Ireland, is probably to his reputed retreat on an island in Lough Derg ('St Patrick's Purgatory'), which became a place of pilgrimage. St Bernard (1090–1153) was the most famous and influential among the Cistercians, whose monasteries were as a matter of principle established in remote and secluded areas. St Bruno (c 1032–1101) retired with a few companions to Chartreuse in the mountains near Grenoble, and later chose a monastic life in the wilds of Calabria rather than accepting an archbishopric. He is usually considered to be the founder of the Carthusians. Erasmus' doubts may relate to the time lapse between the foundation of the Grande Chartreuse in 1084 and papal recognition of the order, after Bruno's

It was weariness with the exile of this life which caused the pious to take refuge in such places; they wished to separate themselves from the inhabitants of Kedar. Yet wherever you turn on this earth, wherever you hide yourself, you are in exile. Go and seek out retreats as remote as you like – you are still a human being going to human beings. You may flee the whole society of humankind, but you take your humanity with you; you carry around that mortal body whose burden the Apostle so bemoans.[165] We read that St Basil recalled to their urban societies those monks who lived in wildernesses, remote from human company. Being a man of some shrewdness, he realized that most of these people were not genuinely pious, but haughty and arrogant, with a mistaken belief in their own holiness, irritable, quarrelsome, moody, lacking any sense of social responsibility, and incapable of leading a normal life.[166] St John Chrysostom says that this is also shown by experience, when through their fasting, their vigils, and their nights sleeping on the ground any of them succeeds in becoming a bishop.[167] They sought outside what should have been sought within. They made nests, but not in the courts of the Lord, since the kingdom of God is within us.[168]

Here the sequence of words reminds us that we should return to our nests – the nest being the place where our longings rest, where we quietly tend our young, that is, our worries and ambitions. Happiness is said to consist in attaining wisdom and desiring nothing more, a state which no one can achieve in this life. For other animals nature has laid down goals for happiness, and when once they reach the end for which they were created, each has attained its own content. But the soul of man, being divine and immortal, can find no true resting place in this life if he does not pursue the end for which he was created. What then is this end? With both body

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death, in 1176, or perhaps to the fact that Bruno established the Chartreuse with six others.

165 2 Cor 4:10

166 St Basil (c 330–79), the most influential figure in the formation of Eastern monasticism, came to prefer the communal or cenobitic form over that of the solitary ascetic: see for instance his *Regula fusius tractata* q.7, PG 31 928–33.

167 Perhaps a reference to *De sacerdotio* 6.5–6 PG 48 682, where Chrysostom argues that fasting, sleeping on the ground, and vigils contribute only to bodily strength and do nothing to eliminate pride and self-will or inculcate the virtues required of a priest. Erasmus alludes to these two authors somewhat selectively; Basil and especially Chrysostom both had some admiration for the achievements of these solitary ascetics.

168 Luke 17:21

and soul to know, to love, and to glorify God, his Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. 'This is the life eternal,' says the Lord, 'to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'[169] To know him is to see him; to see him, to delight in him: and to delight in him is the ultimate joy. This blessed state in its fullness occurs only at the resurrection of the righteous; but still there is here some sort of nest within the courts of the church, though it is a nest which is suspended, and dependent on hope for things to come. But outside the church there is no hope of true happiness.[170] The human soul is so great, so capacious, that even if you gave it innumerable worlds but not God, only God could satisfy it. Even inanimate objects are observed each tending towards its resting place. When a stone is cast from a high place, it lies still as soon as it reaches the ground, while flames are driven with great force to their proper location. The force which from time to time so shakes the earth that it can shatter even mountains of rock is simply the wind, striving to break out into its native place. Similarly, if a bladder is distended with air and pushed under water, it will leap up to the surface. Now the human soul is a fiery substance, and however much it is weighed down by this poor earthly body, it cannot rest until it has taken wing to its native place of rest.[171]

All human beings by their nature chase after leisure, seeking some place where their soul may repose; but since they place their nests among things which are useless or perishable, the more they seek calm, the greater are the turmoils in which they are embroiled. What else is the purpose of all those tomes of the ancients 'On the chief good,' 'On the aim of good things,' 'On quietness of mind' – εὐθυμία in Greek.[172] One has built a nest

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169 John 17:3

170 An allusion to the maxim so important to this work, *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* 'there is no salvation outside the church' (see n79 above), an early statement of which is found in Cyprian Ep 73.21 PL 4.425B. On the wider issue see B. Sesboué *Hors de l'église pas de salut: Histoire d'une formule et problèmes d'interpretation* (Paris 2004).

171 The argument here is a more 'scientific' formulation of Augustine's famous words in *Confessions* 1.1: *inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te* 'our heart has no rest until it rests in you' (and cf 13.9). In ancient physics fire is the lightest of the four elements and so naturally tends upwards. Ficino uses somewhat similar arguments and examples in *Theologia Platonica* 4.1, 14.1–2; see also Maria Cytowska 'Érasme de Rotterdam et Marsile Ficin son maître' *Eos* 63 (1975) 165–79.

172 Such phrases do indeed tend to recur in Roman philosophical writings. Cicero uses the phrase *summum bonum* frequently (eg *De officiis* 1.5), but it seems not to be the title of a work before Isidore of Seville (c 560–636). *De finibus*

in knowledge, one in idleness, one in pleasure, another in the perfected state of virtue called wisdom, and others in the practice and performance of virtue. But all these, in Paul's words, 'became vain in their imaginations';[173] with their lips they promise 'quietness of mind' to others, using splendid words, but their own heart is far from being at rest. Why is this? Because they have not rejoiced in the living God. If the greatest philosophers have strayed so far, what can one say of ordinary people, who count happiness in terms of money? When they reach the aim they have set themselves, they discover the exact truth of the words of the poet of Venusia: 'In the train of growing wealth follows Care.'[174] Also this: 'The more money grows, the more the love of wealth.'[175]

Others despise wealth and pursue kingship and power. What other aim had Alexander the Great in causing so much upheaval? But how large a part of the world could he actually make subject to himself? And supposing he had conquered it all, still if he had learned from Democritus that the number of worlds is infinite, he would have cried out in despair, having spent so much effort on part of a single world.[176] Look at the efforts made by Julius Caesar, and all that he endured, to attain the mastery of the Roman world. Yet when he had attained it, he was not even then content; he was so afflicted by worries and by awareness of the crimes he had committed that he became tired of life and longed for death – though it was a death he would not have wished.[177] There can be no real peace where the conscience is uneasy. Human ambitions have no limit. One man promises himself an end to his exertions if he can get as his wife such-and-such a girl, beautiful and with a large dowry – but instead of peace and quiet he finds a whole host of annoyances. Another is assured of a happy life if he gets a particular

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bonorum ac malorum is a treatise by Cicero. *De tranquillitate animi* is by Seneca; it is also the Latin title given to Plutarch's περὶ εὐθυμίας. The following sentence alludes to the guiding principles of the various schools of ancient (ethical) philosophy.

173 Rom 1:21

174 Horace *Odes* 3.16.17

175 Juvenal 14.139

176 This supposition is told as fact in Valerius Maximus 8.14. ext.2, whence *Apophthegmata* 4.58 LB 4 201D. In a slightly different form the topos is also alluded to in Juvenal 10.168–70. Democritus was one of the most prominent of atomist philosophers; his belief in the infinity of worlds is attested in H. Diels and W. Kranz *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin 1952) 68 A40, 43.

177 That Caesar longed for death is said to have been a contemporary supposition in Suetonius *Divus Iulius* 86.

benefice – but once he has got it, his enthusiasm for the hunt grows keener. Benefice is piled on benefice; he succeeds in reaching the rank of abbot; he tries for a bishopric; then the mitre is exchanged for a richer mitre. He longs for the heights of the cardinalate, and when he reaches this, he turns his attention to the triple tiara.[178] Now is he content at last? Let us ask Julius II, whose extreme old age was thrown into confusion by a terrible tide of events.[179] Others may judge other cases.

There is nothing far-fetched in St Augustine's interpretation of the bird's young as our good works, which are useless unless placed in the nest of the Catholic church.[180] Phocion, Aristides, Trajan, Antoninus, and many others served their country with much courage, uprightness, and loyalty.[181] We praise the self-control of Zeno, the incorruptibility of Xenocrates, the willing endurance of Socrates, but their deeds were not performed in Christ and so did not bring true happiness.[182] The emperor Julian disbursed vast sums of money for the support of the poor – but against Christ.[183] Similarly there are some quite exceptional virtues, barely credible, reported of many heretics – the Ebionites' extreme contempt for wealth, the Euchites' extraordinary perseverance in prayer, the extreme abstinence and austerity

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178 Cf *In psalmum 22* CWE 64 176; also see 181 below.

179 The last years of the ambitious and warlike Julius II, a recurring figure in Erasmus' demonology, were dominated by prolonged and bitter conflict with Louis XII of France, who gave support to the schismatic Council of Pisa (1511) which denounced Julius. See CEBR II 250–2.

180 Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 83* PL 37 1061

181 Phocion and Aristides (the latter surnamed 'the just') were Athenian politicians of the fourth and fifth century BC respectively, known for their integrity, and both the subjects of lives by Plutarch. Trajan, Roman emperor 98–117, was esteemed as a 'good emperor,' so much so that a medieval legend (referred to in Dante *Purgatorio* 10) related that Gregory the Great prayed successfully that his soul should be saved. By 'Antoninus' Erasmus may mean either Antoninus Pius (138–61) or Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (161–80), author of the *Meditations*, both of whom were also reckoned among the 'good emperors.'

182 We move from rulers and politicians to philosophers. Zeno of Citium (335–262 BC), founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, is here taken as its representative; Xenocrates was head of the Platonic Academy from 339 to 314 BC and an exceptionally respected personality in his day; the endurance of Socrates referred to may indicate not only his physical self-discipline but his decision to respect the laws of the state and not to escape his death sentence, as described in Plato's dialogue *Crito*. On the argument here, see the Introductory Note 129 above.

183 In his *Letter to Arsacius* of about 320 Julian recommended a pagan-based philanthropy.

of life practised by the Manichees.[184] But all these achievements were in vain, since these people did not place their young in the nest of the church. They each built nests in their own tabernacles, and so the old proverb, 'a bad egg comes from a bad crow,' will apply to them,[185] and those who want young doves to hatch should take care to keep snakes well away. Consequently, if we seek real peace of mind, let us remain in the tabernacle of the Lord of hosts and stay in the unity of the Catholic church – Jerusalem, which is built as a city founded upon itself.[186] This is the blessed peace mentioned in another psalm: 'In peace, in very peace, will I sleep and take my rest. For you alone, O Lord, have made me dwell in hope.'[187]

Sion – the name means watchtower in Hebrew[188] – is a hill in Jerusalem where the tabernacle and the royal palace were situated. Let us therefore climb this hill. If you ask how, we must climb by despising earthly things and by longing for the life of heaven. And there, worn out after lengthy wanderings and wrong turnings, and after all the fruitless worries of human affairs, we shall find a nest in which to refresh ourselves, and we shall find rest. Psalm 14 says: 'Lord, who will dwell in your tabernacle? Or who will rest on your holy mountain?'[189] Let us enter without spot of heresy, increasing in 'faith which works through love.'[190] Let us practise the righteousness not of the Jews but of the gospels, and hold God alone responsible for all the good we are seen to do. And to fly to the top of the hill, let us be like sparrows in our humility of mind, poor and worthless in our own eyes, taking no thought for the morrow, but giving all our worries to him who cares for us.[191] Let us be turtle doves in our innocence and purity, and let us realize that here we have no lasting home, and continually look to the heavenly Jerusalem. Let us heed our Lord's words when he calls us

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184 Erasmus returns to early Christian heresies. The Ebionites were a judaizing Christian sect which maintained the binding nature of the law of Moses and rejected the authority of St Paul and at least sometimes the doctrine of the virgin birth. The Euchites held that only extreme asceticism could eliminate sin. For the Manichees, see n65 above.

185 *Adagia* I ix 25: *Mali corvi malum ovum*

186 Ps 121/122:3

187 Ps 4:9–10/4:8

188 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 830

189 Ps 14/15:1. Erasmus' commentary on this psalm was the last of his psalm commentaries, published in 1536, three years after the present work. See 218–67 below.

190 Gal 5:6

191 Cf 1 Pet 5:7.

to true peace of mind: 'Come to me, all you who labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me that I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.'[192] By human standards the words are ridiculous. What rest can there be for the meek and lowly when they are trampled on and turned out of their homes? What rest is there for those who bear the yoke? The yoke signifies slavery, and in the words of the Greek proverb 'slaves have no leisure.'[193] But those who are meek, following Christ's example, inherit the earth;[194] those who are lowly in the world's eyes are exalted in Christ and can reach to the sky; and those who submit to Christ's easy yoke are in truth free. This submission consists in trusting his promises without question. Let us then follow the prophet, our guide to the mysteries,[195] as from the portals he shows us how lovely, how beautiful, and how admirable are the courts of the Lord, and how peaceful is the soul's repose therein.

But now from the court he shows us the altars of the Lord, a holier and more beautiful part of the temple. 'Your altars, O Lord of hosts, my king and my God.' The Jews felt a great religious awe for their temple and its fittings, and adorned its altars with great magnificence. This explains those words, 'the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord,'[196] while the most solemn oath was that taken by the temple and by the altar;[197] and our Lord's words, 'destroy this temple,'[198] did not go unpunished. But these are merely types of spiritual realities. As the prophet speaks, he contemplates another tabernacle not made by hands, and he sees another altar which fills him with such awe that, beside himself as he is, words fail him.

Some scholars take the words 'your altars, O Lord' to follow on from the earlier: 'How delightful are your tabernacles, how delightful are your altars.' Augustine takes them with the words immediately preceding: 'The sparrow has found her a home and the turtle dove a nest,' so that 'your altars' follows in apposition, and we then understand the altars to be the nests in which we repose.[199] To me it seems more likely that the sentence is

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192 Matt 11:28–9
193 *Adagia* II iii 46: *Nullum ocium servis*
194 Cf Matt 5:4.
195 'Guide to the mysteries' (*mystagogus*) is a technical term for one who initiates another into ancient mystery rites such as those of Eleusis. The word was already used figuratively in antiquity.
196 Jer 7:4: 'deceptive words'
197 Matt 23:16–22
198 John 2:19
199 Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 83* PL 37 1061

left incomplete, better to express the feeling of wonder. Similarly when we see the splendidly constructed residence of a ruler, we say in astonishment 'a royal palace!' – with the stress on 'royal'; and in the psalmist's words there is a strong emphasis on the adjective 'your.' You alone are the Lord of hosts [*virtutes*], and these are your altars, worthy of you and pleasing to you. Here again for *virtutum* the Greek has δυνάμεων, which is, as I have remarked, the Hebrew *Sabaoth* – 'of armies.' The repetition is intended to make us see that, however insignificant and defenceless the church is in worldly terms, with the God of hosts as its protector it is unvanquished, and even the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.[200] These are not the sort of altars which are spattered with the blood of calves, goats, and rams; already through the mouth of Isaiah the Lord had rejected that sort of offering.[201] What then are they? God is spirit, and takes delight in spiritual offerings. He has pleasure not in the slaughter of sheep but in the putting to death of desires which fight against the spirit.[202] If through love of Christ you have slaughtered in yourself the desire for money, and have given away to the members of Christ what previously you kept hidden and worshipped as God, you have offered up to God a victim most pleasing in his sight. If you have sacrificed extravagance and wantonness, and if though once a habitual drunkard and lecher you now live in temperance and chastity, your sacrifice is acceptable to God. If when you are injured by a neighbour you repress your anger for the sake of Christ and refrain from revenge, you have made God a most pleasing offering. If your faith is strong and your heart warm with love, and you surrender your whole self and everything that is yours to God's will, if you are prepared even to suffer death and hell should he so decide, then you have performed a burnt sacrifice which is pleasing to the Lord of hosts. This is the 'rational' or spiritual worship, the living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, to which the apostle exhorts us so urgently in Romans 12. God takes no pleasure in the smoke of incense, or myrrh, or storax.[203] Rather, he loves the spirit's fragrance, the vows and prayers of the pious, the giving of thanks, and the sacrifice of praise in which he delights to receive honour. Through these sacrificial offerings is the road to the sight of God's salvation, which is also the aim and conclusion of this psalm: 'The God of gods will be seen in Sion.' When prayers are said in faith, they are acceptable, while the offering of thanks in the name

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200 Cf Matt 16:18.
201 Isa 1:11
202 Cf Gal 5:17.
203 Cf Ps 50/51:16.

of Christ should be made not only in favourable circumstances but also in adversity. The sacrifice of praise will be well performed if, in accordance with the teaching of Paul,[204] we perform all our works, in word and deed, not for our glory but for God's. Because it is spiritual, this is the truly pure offering, made continually throughout the world upon the church's altars. In this nest we may safely repose for a time, since these altars belong not to men but to the Lord of hosts, whose will no one can withstand, and who desired worship from the simple and meek, and wished to give the kingdom of heaven to the humble. Indeed he himself in the Gospel gives thanks in their name to his Father: 'You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them to children. So it was, Father, since this was pleasing before you.'[205] There is no need to fear the world or the devil if the Lord of hosts has received you into his tabernacles. He looks after what he has made, he walks among his own and rules them, he brings his creation to perfection. As lord of hosts he protects us, as king he governs us, as God he brings us to the kingdom of heaven.

'My King and my God': The wording of Psalm 43 is similar: 'You are my King and my God.'[206] This can specifically be referred to Christ, the head of the church, who in the second psalm says: 'For I was made king by him on Sion his holy mountain.' The whole world is under God's sway. But though even evil spirits acknowledge and tremble before his omnipotence,[207] it is peculiar to faith to say 'my King and my God.' It is impossible to say 'Lord Jesus' except in the Holy Spirit;[208] yet all around we hear the voices of those who call 'Lord Jesus.' In the same way no one can say 'my King and my God' unless he has entrusted himself in complete faith to God's will and from him alone expects the prize of eternal bliss. Another psalm calls that people happy whose God is the Lord.[209] Again, in Leviticus 26, as in some other passages of Scripture, the Lord speaks thus: 'I will place my tabernacle in your midst, and my soul shall not reject you. I will walk among you, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people.'[210] Here he calls God king; later, the lawgiver.[211] And so, if we acknowledge

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204 Col 3:17; 1 Cor 10:31
205 Matt 11:25–6
206 Ps 43/44:5
207 Cf James 2:19.
208 1 Cor 12:3
209 Ps 143/144:15
210 Lev 26:11–12. Similar passages are Ezek 37:27 (the closest); Exod 6:7; Jer 24:7; Rev 22:13.
211 At verse 8 of this psalm, following the Vulgate text

him as king, let us obey his laws. If we acknowledge him as God, let us love nothing above him; rather, let us love nothing at all which we do not love for his sake. The word 'king' also reminds us that we were redeemed by Christ's blood from the devil's tyranny, and having been under the sway of a most cruel and degraded master, we came under the rule of a most merciful king.

Thus far our guide or priest in the mysteries[212] has shown the lovely tabernacle of the Lord, bringing us into the courtyard, and showing us the altars and spiritual sacrifices. Now he shows us those excellent priests, truly worthy of God, who fulfil the sacred functions in the Lord's temple. 'Blessed are they,' he says, 'who dwell in your house, O Lord: they will praise you for ever.' Those who are strong in faith and 'rooted in love'[213] dwell now not in the courts but in the very house of the Lord: for 'to dwell' implies permanence. Why then are they blessed? Is it because they have abundant riches, or are crowned with honours, or live a life of utmost luxury? Certainly not. Then why? Because, as it says, they will praise you for ever. Here is the quiet home which the sparrow has found for herself, the peaceful nest discovered by the turtle dove. For this is the ultimate purpose for which man was created, to know, to love, and to hymn his maker, his redeemer, his ruler, and reward-giver. In the human world it seems a more fortunate state to be praised than to praise, but it is otherwise where God is concerned. No one's praises can increase God's good fortune, since he is the eternal source of all glory. But anyone who praises him is happy, simply because of this act. However, not all those who sing 'glory to you, O Lord'[214] are praising him. If in their hearts dwells charity, the bond of perfection; and if the peace of Christ, to which they were called, abounds; if they are bound together as one, and each encourages the others with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thanksgiving to God in their hearts[215] – then they praise him. If we ought to praise God with our bodily voice, then let us 'sing with the spirit and with the understanding also.'[216] There is nothing beautiful about the praise of God in a sinner's mouth, nor is music pleasing to God where harmonious voices conceal minds at variance. Lastly, God does not welcome hymns outside his house, which is the church. If we

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212 *Mystagogus* (see n195) or *hierophanta*, the hierophant being the chief priest at the Eleusinian and other pagan mysteries
213 Eph 3:17
214 Response in the mass following the announcement of the gospel
215 This whole condition is a paraphrase of Col 3:14–16.
216 1 Cor 14:15

wish to be blessed, let us praise God in complete harmony, like the angels, among whom is no discord. Every part of creation, each in its own manner, praises the Lord. Not only do 'the heavens declare the glory of God,'[217] but every living species, the very elements and everything made from them, by their appearance proclaim the omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness of their creator, and so shout out God's praises. So, in the Psalms[218] and in the Song of the Three Holy Children,[219] not only the sun and moon, but also cattle and fishes, mountains and hills, seas and rivers, are called upon to praise God's name. Only wicked spirits and evil men are not asked to join the chorus, since their participation has the opposite effect, in so far as is possible, of blasphemy against the Lord's name.

But what exactly does the prophet mean by adding 'They will praise you for ever?' At this point the word *Selah* occurs, translated by Jerome as 'always.'[220] But some scholars claim that the word cannot have this meaning,[221] since it is found nowhere in the Bible except in the Psalms, and it occurs in some passages where 'always' makes no sense. They suggest that *Selah* means the same as *diapsalma*, that is, a sign that the tune should change. (The psalms were set to music for voices and instruments). Today, too, musicians use signs to indicate a point at which the way the song is sung should change, since not every kind of music suits the sentiment to be expressed.[222] In comedies different tunes were played on the flute during, or perhaps before, the spoken part of the play, so that the audience would know what type of speech to expect, whether serious or the reverse.[223] Certainly in this psalm a new theme seems to begin after this word, which marks a pause. But whatever the truth in all this, it is clear that the words 'for ever' signify something eternal, and so the application cannot be to the former temple at Jerusalem, which stood for not much more than two hundred years. Still, the great majority of Jews were convinced that the law and religion of that temple would last till the end of the

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217 Ps 18/19:1
218 Notably Psalm 148
219 Dan 3:51–90
220 In the *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* PL 28 (1890) 276. In the Vulgate version the word appears as *diapsalma*. On the meaning of *Selah*, compare the longer discussion of *In psalmum 4* CWE 63 245–6 and n395.
221 Thus Paul of Burgos in his *Additiones* to the *Postilla* of Nicholas of Lyra *Postilla super Psalterium*, vol III in multi-volume Latin Bible sets
222 Erasmus' terminology is vague here, and given his lack of interest in music (see n392 below) it seems inappropriate to suggest a more precise translation.
223 From [Donatus] *De comoedia* 8.11, a well-known text in the Middle Ages

world,[224] just as the Romans believed that the Capitol would last for ever;[225] yet the Romans today cannot point out even one remnant of the Capitol, nor the Jews of the temple at Jerusalem. The psalmist, then, with the eye of prophecy, beheld another temple, where God's name is praised without ceasing; and this, obviously, is the Catholic church.

But how can praise be eternal when those who praise are mortal? This church which praises God waits for its fulfilment, but knows no end. As love never leaves the devout, similarly the praise of God which we perform here finds its fulfilment in heaven. As soon as the soul takes flight from its earthly habitation, it joins the angels and the souls of the blessed in singing with greater clarity its praises to God, until the time when it receives a body which is not now 'natural' but spiritual, when the whole man will chant his Creator's praises without ceasing and without pause. For the church triumphant in heaven is exactly the same thing as the church militant on earth, except that it is purer. Similarly, according to some philosophers the air next to the earth on which we walk is the same as that which adjoins the far side of the moon, except that there it is purer and here, being contaminated by the earth, it is more gross.[226] In that case, there is nothing to prevent each one of us, even though we are weighed down by this mortal body, from praising our God without ceasing. How is this possible, you ask? Well, it is possible. If all our thoughts, words, and deeds are directed towards the glory of God, even when we eat and drink, even when we sleep or refresh our poor bodies in recreation, then we praise our God.[227] 'Glorify the Lord,' says the Apostle, 'and carry him in your body.'[228] Not all the parts of the body have the gift of speech, but even if the tongue is silent, all the members of our body glorify God if they serve righteousness.

The prophet, then, as though in an ecstasy, had reached that heavenly Jerusalem, in which the songs of praise are not broken off by any troubles,

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224 Perhaps based on 3 Kings/1 Kings 8:13, 9:3

225 See Horace *Odes* 3.30.7–9.

226 The usual medieval conception, based on Aristotle, was that the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire made up the world below the sphere of the moon, in the centre of the spherical universe, while above the moon is the purer fifth element of *aether* or 'quintessence.' However, Plato (*Timaeus* 58D) had proposed that aether was merely a particularly pure form of air.

227 This is a development from *In psalmum 33* CWE 64 317, where at first Erasmus seems to reject a literal interpretation of 'his praise shall be always in my mouth,' saying that 'always' is hyperbole for 'very often,' but then gives an alternative explanation similar to that above.

228 1 Cor 6:20

nor spoiled by any dissension, and no necessity interrupts the hymns sung to God. (As St Paul says: 'If we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are sane, it is for you.')[229] Then here he comes to himself, as it were, he remembers that he is human, and to those who wander here in exile he points out the way by which they may reach that blessed peace. Previously, he said: 'Blessed are those who dwell in your house, O Lord,' in which number he includes the angels and the souls of the pious which live with the angels. Now, changing the style of music, he says: 'Blessed is the man [*vir*] . . .,' or as Jerome translates from the Hebrew: 'Blessed is the human being [*homo*] . . .'[230] The word 'man' is meant to include women: In Christ is neither man nor woman, neither slave nor free, but a new creation.[231] The word 'human' reminds us of our weakness; for unless God in his mercy stretches out his hand to us, we cannot even reach the church's outer court, so far are we from being able to take wing to the seat of blessedness. For faith is the gateway to the church, and without it baptism is useless. But no one can give himself faith, which is a gift of God, by which he reaches those he wishes to reach, and draws them to Christ. Man, in so far as he is man, belongs to the flesh, and knows nothing but the world. The prophet is aware of this, and now says, with more gentle music: 'Blessed is the man [*homo*] whose help is from you.' Alternatively, St Augustine reads *assumptio* (Greek ἀντίλημψις),[232] a word that applies to one who extends a hand to someone trying to climb up; for the church too is a city built on high ground, just as the temple at Jerusalem was on Mount Sion. And for 'help' [*auxilium*] Jerome reads 'strength' [*fortitudo*]; different words, the same sense. Those who climb to high places have need of strength; yet man can do nothing of

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229 2 Cor 5:13

230 Latin *homo* is a truly 'common' word, referring to a human being, either male or female. It would therefore be the more natural word to use in the present context, and it is, as Erasmus points out, the version of the *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* PL 28 (1890) 276. *Vir* can properly refer to males only. *Homo* may also, though it need not, carry the connotations of human weakness which are alluded to in the following sentence. The Hebrew word in the original is commonly but not always gender-inclusive. (It may be worth pointing out that translating *homo/homines* into English has presented some difficulties in the context of formal or traditional religious language, where the only easy equivalent is 'man/men.' It should be remembered that the Latin is more inclusive.)

231 Gal 3:28, 6:15

232 In fact all editions of Augustine, Erasmus' included (Basel 1529), VIII 633, read *susceptio*, properly a 'venture,' 'undertaking' (cf PL 37 1003, CCSL 39 1154). Ἀντίλημψις is the reading of the Septuagint.

himself. Faith of itself, however, gives man strength, so he need no longer fear the world or the devil. Consequently those who put all their trust in God are strengthened by the force of the Spirit and are able to go up into the mountain of the Lord.

There were fifteen steps leading up to the temple of the Jews built by Solomon.[233] At the first step the prophet complains of wicked tongues and the tedium of exile.[234] At the second he is strengthened by the gift of faith, and says: 'I have lifted mine eyes to the mountains, whence will come help. My help is from the Lord, who has made heaven and earth.'[235] It is faith which makes our steps steady and prevents us from stumbling; as Paul says to the Corinthians: 'You all stand by faith,' and again in Romans: 'But you stand by faith.' And St Peter urges us to 'stand against the devil, being strong in faith.'[236] The man who is truly strong is weak in himself, deriving his strength from God. This is Isaiah's meaning when he says that this song will be sung in the land of Judah.[237] The song is that of the proclamation of the gospel, and Judah in Hebrew means 'one who acknowledges.'[238] What is the song, then? 'Sion is the city of our strength.' Sion is the church, but where do the unwarlike find their strength? 'Its walls and ramparts will be our salvation.'[239] Then – a defence which cannot be overthrown – he says: 'In silence and hope will be your strength.'[240] We wait in silence when we are completely confident of what we have been promised, while the hope of such great blessedness, which causes no shame since it cannot fail, cheers our hearts even in the midst of sorrow and death.

Our blessedness is not indeed complete in this life, but a large proportion of it is present when we remember how transitory is this whole span of life, and how 'our afflictions are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed in us.'[241] In comparison, how certain and how good is the faith of him who has made us this promise. We may deny him, but he

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233 Erasmus follows tradition in linking these steps with the fifteen Gradual Psalms (Pss 119/120–133/134); see Cassiodorus PL 70 901C and CWE 64 189 n420.
234 Ps 119/120, referred to and quoted above, 165 and n155
235 Ps 120/121:1–2
236 2 Cor 1:24; Rom 11:19; 1 Pet 5:8
237 Isa 26:1
238 *Confitentem* 'one who acknowledges the truth of a statement.' The source is Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 841: 'confitens sive glorificans.'
239 Continuing the quotation from Isa 26:1
240 Isa 30:15
241 Rom 8:18

remains faithful and cannot deny himself,[242] so long as we remain in faith and charity, and keep ourselves within the bounds of God's house. There we must grow to the measure of Christ's fullness,[243] and ascend the fifteen mystical steps to the eternal tabernacle, and eagerly progress through the forty-two stopping places[244] to that land of peace which our Lord in the Gospel promised to the gentle.[245] Our object is lofty, our goal far from ordinary, and no one can reach the top from the bottom all at once. We need someone to point out the way, as God guided the children of Israel, who typologically represent ourselves, through the pathless desert. We need someone to hold out a hand from above and to pull us upwards as we struggle to rise. We can do none of these things for ourselves: 'It is the Lord who works in us both to will and to perform.'[246] It is he who through faith opens our eyes, so that we may see where we are, loathe what we are, and aspire to what we are not yet. This then is the first help which the Lord offers us, the first step towards blessedness: that we should lift our eyes to the mountains. It is by heaven's gift that we love the things of heaven and despise the things of earth, and those who concentrate on their own wisdom, their own strength and merits, or those who pay attention only to rituals, indulgences, and papal dispensations, never reach that blessed state. What then are the actions of the candidate for blessedness, one to whom the Lord has granted through faith that he may reject the things of the world and raise his eyes to the mountains of eternity? 'He builds in his heart steps leading upwards' – ἀναβάσεις or 'ascents.'[247] Ἀναβάσεις here are the same as the ἀναβαθμοί of the Gradual Psalms: steps, but steps leading upwards, while in Latin the same word serves for steps going up and going down. Yet in affairs of religion we must never retrace our steps; we must forget

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242 Cf 2 Tim 2:13.

243 Eph 4:13

244 Those used by the Israelites on their journey through the wilderness (Numbers 33). For the mystical sense of these *mansiones*, cf *In psalmum 22* CWE 64 189 and n418; and see Screech 60. The first edition, like the passage in Ps 22, gives the number 'forty'; the correction comes in the second edition.

245 Matt 5:4

246 Cf Phil 2:13.

247 Unusually, the flow of Erasmus' argument leads him to change a tense in the first quotation of this verse, 'builds' for 'has built.' More significant is his preference for *gradus ascensorii* over the somewhat obscure *ascensiones* of the Vulgate, enabling him to link the verse with the Gradual Psalms and the fifteen mystical steps to the temple (n233 above), and to develop the argument which follows.

what we have left behind us and strive always towards greater perfection. Eurydice looked back, and slipped once more into the underworld.[248] Lot's wife looked back, and became a pillar of salt.[249] Religious devotion, too, has steps, like the ages of man. Catechumens are born, and immediately after baptism they are nourished like babies on milk, but when they are adult they are given for solid food more esoteric mysteries. And Paul 'speaks wisdom among the mature,' but among the weaker brethren he claims to know nothing 'except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.'[250] Anyone, then, who raises his eyes to the mountains builds steps which lead upwards. Where are these steps? 'In his heart.' We should not be surprised that it is with our emotions and not our feet that we ascend that mountain. There are indeed outward steps, which should not be criticized, but they are useless unless one builds steps in one's heart. From a layman one may become a cleric, from a cleric a subdeacon, then a deacon, then an archdeacon, then a priest, and finally a bishop.[251] Or again, the layman may become a monk, and from a canon regular a Dominican, from a Dominican a Franciscan, from a Franciscan a Benedictine, from a Benedictine a Carthusian.[252] Still, the orders themselves, making their judgment in accordance with externals, argue much about the arrangement of these steps. Some think that the Franciscans occupy a higher place, because they go about with feet half bare and refuse to touch money. Others rank the Dominicans above them because they eat no meat in their houses.[253] Still others prefer the Benedictines to either, because they spend more time chanting their office, and because they never leave their monastery. But the highest place among all these orders is reserved for those who irritate their skin by wearing a metal corselet instead of a vest. All these are useful steps towards greater piety if with the help of

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248 A slip, presumably due to the supposed analogy with Lot's wife. In the well-known story (Virgil *Georgics* 4.485–503, followed by Ovid *Metamorphoses* 10.49–63) it is Orpheus himself who looks round when leading his wife Eurydice from the underworld, thus causing her to fall back irrevocably.

249 Gen 19:26

250 1 Cor 2:2

251 Cf 170 above.

252 Such a career progression through different orders was scarcely likely, although it was possible in theory at least to move to an order considered more strict. As one instance, François Rabelais (1483–1553) entered the Franciscan Observants and then transferred to the Benedictines before reverting to the secular priesthood.

253 Perhaps a pun: *Dominicanos, quod domi non vescantur carnibus*. The Dominicans are good customers of the fishmonger in the colloquy Ἰχθυοφαγία 'A Fish Diet' CWE 40 684.

the Lord you build real steps in your heart. If you cease from getting your living by theft, you have taken a step towards piety; if you not only return your ill-gotten gains but for the love of Christ give even what is your own to the needy, you have gone up a higher step. If from being savage and violent you become blameless in this respect, you have climbed a step in your heart, but if you try to do good to everyone, you have reached a higher grade. Finally, if when you are seriously wronged you not only dismiss all thoughts of vengeance from your mind but take pleasure, in the grace of Christ, in wishing your wrongdoers well and doing good to them, then you have achieved a really exalted step.

These are simply examples; everyone can think of others himself. They are steps which are laid out in the heart, in the inmost corners of the soul. The blessed man of the psalm, then, builds in his heart the steps which we use to try to reach perfection. He does not boast of his worth to other people, but can justify himself to him who sees human hearts,[254] though he expects no help except from the Lord. Such are his thoughts 'in the vale of tears.' For what else is this whole world but a dark valley, where people are always being born, giving birth, dying, in sickness or need, journeying or making war, and a thousand more occasions for tears, from which no power, wealth, or royal rank can confer immunity. This is the valley of Achor, meaning the valley of 'confusion and tumult,'[255] into which Achan was cast, according to Joshua 7. After we were cast out from Eden by reason of our disobedience, 'the Lord put us in this place'[256] so that, living for a while in exile, we might through faithful obedience and observance of God's precepts return to our native land. But we should not feel disgust for this valley, since God's own Son thought it worthy to descend here, to be to us 'the way, the truth, and the life.'[257] Now as long as we live in this mortal body, we spend our time in a vale of tears. It may be objected that it is in vain for man to make ascending steps in his heart if he must remain in the vale of tears. But in Isaiah 65 the valley of Achor becomes a place of rest for cattle, and in Hosea 2 it is given to Jerusalem as a sign of hope.[258] Further, one must bear in mind that the ascent of the hill of Sion is through

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254 Rom 8:27

255 Jerome *De nominibus hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 801

256 Again Erasmus avoids direct quotation of the psalm, which has in the Vulgate *in valle lacrymarum, in loco quem posuit* 'in the vale of tears, in the place which he has put down,' or possibly 'in the place where he has put him.'

257 John 14:6

258 Isa 65:10; Hos 2:15

the emotions and not by the feet; with the heart, not with steps. The body remains in the valley, the soul struggles to climb the mountain. Thus it was decreed by our king, so that we might come through this world's passing afflictions and so attain the crown of immortality.[259]

The rule of this soldiering should not seem hard to us, since our king, who gave us the rule, took it upon himself. Neither should we despair, for 'the one who summons us to the contest will give us his blessing';[260] he helps us in danger and comforts us in our troubles, so that we are able to bear them. Our master of the games[261] calls his own to the contest and announces great prizes to those who have competed lawfully.[262] He presides, yet is present not only as spectator and judge but also as a helper. He supplies our strength and motivates us. For 'blessing' [*benedictio*] here means not 'praise' but 'abundance,' as Paul uses it: 'He who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows in abundance [*in benedictionibus*] shall reap abundantly [*de benedictionibus*].'[263] It is a harsh law that says: 'He who does not take up his cross every day and follow me cannot be my disciple. He who does not hate his father and his mother, even his own soul, is not worthy of me,' and so on.[264] It is, I repeat, a hard, repellent law, unless one receives the gift of grace, and it is this which the Apostle calls εὐλογία [*benedictio*] rather than using any other word, to show that it is freely given, and anything but sparing. Under the law of Moses the gift of grace was indeed sparingly given. Then our God's kindness and generosity shone out, and 'not because of any righteous deeds we ourselves had performed, but from his own mercy, he saved us through the waters of regeneration and renewal,'[265] and he freely poured out his spirit on all flesh. In the human world to bless or praise is something very different from actually benefiting

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259 The passage introduced by this sentence draws heavily on Pauline imagery of fighting (compare eg 2 Cor 10:4ff; Eph 6:11ff) and of athletic competition (eg 1 Cor 9:24ff; Phil 3:14). Direct quotation is, however, limited to the instance from 2 Timothy below.

260 A paraphrase of the psalm's next words, *etenim benedictionem dabit legislator* 'Indeed, the giver of the law will grant his blessing.'

261 'master of the games' (*agonotheta*): In Greece the organizer of an athletic contest such as the games at Olympia. Augustine uses the phrase 'highest *agonotheta*' to signify Christ in *De symbolo ad catechumenos* 3.9 PL 40 (1861) 632.

262 Cf 2 Tim 2:5.

263 2 Cor 9:6

264 A conflation and paraphrase of the related passages in Matt 10:37–9; Luke 9:23–4, 14:26–7

265 Tit 3:5, on which the remainder of the sentence also draws

someone; indeed, it often works for bad and not for good. But for God to bless and to benefit are the same. It is a pious act to prostrate oneself to accept an episcopal blessing, but how much more fitting is it to cast oneself down in front of God and implore *his* blessing!

Now see how great an effect God's blessing may have. 'They will go,' says the psalmist, 'from strength to strength, and the God of gods will be seen in Sion.' The abrupt change of number may seem surprising. He has just said 'Blessed is the man whose help is from you' and 'he has built in his heart . . .' Now we have 'they will go from strength to strength.' How is it that one has suddenly become many? In mystical writings[266] God's blessing brings plenty, as his curse brings sterility. 'Cursed is the earth because of your act; when you till it, it will bring forth for you thorns and thistles.'[267] Conversely, when God created man from wet clay, and his wife from a rib on his left side, he blessed them and said: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'[268] Similarly Psalm 106 has 'He blessed them, and they multiplied exceedingly.'[269] All these, of course, are typological representations of spiritual things. So we see that once the grace of the gospel had freed us from the curse of the Law, and blessing had been bestowed on the apostles through the Holy Spirit, then the worship of the true God, previously confined to the Jews in their tiny corner of the world, spread with amazing speed throughout all nations of the earth. Rank upon rank of virgins, martyrs, and confessors came forward. Whence came this astonishing abundance? Whence indeed, if not from God's blessing? 'Your sons,' says the prophet, 'shall come from afar, and your daughters shall rise up from your side.'[270] So the woman who is alone and widowed[271] marvels at her unhoped-for fertility, saying: 'And these sons, whence have they come?' They have come from every nation under heaven: from India, from furthest Spain, from Thrace, from among the Goths, the Scots, and the Irish. And so, increased by God's blessing, enlivened by faith, enkindled by hope, 'they will go from virtue to virtue.' Here too this word is equivalent not to ἀρετή, but rather to ἐκ δυνάμεως εἰς δύναμιν, and Jerome translates the Hebrew as 'from strength to strength.'[272] It requires strength to spurn the pleasures, wealth,

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266 A fairly common Erasmian phrase for the Bible, with the implication that it is best understood in an allegorical sense
267 Gen 3:17–18
268 Gen 1:28
269 Ps 106/107:38
270 Isa 60:4
271 Isa 54:6
272 Jerome *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* PL 28 (1890) 276

and accolades of this world for Christ's sake, but greater strength is needed to conquer one's natural affection for one's parents, wife, and children, and it is strongest of all to despise death and tortures worse than death for love of the life of heaven.

People who climb steps become more tired the higher they climb, but those who climb these steps are made keener and more able. How is this? It can only be that their strength comes not from human resources but from God's blessing. Otherwise, whence comes such manifest mental strength, such zeal as was displayed by apostles, young men and virgins in filthy dungeons, among flames and torture, and in deaths which the human mind cannot bear even to contemplate? Their fortitude came solely from the master of the games and giver of laws, who increases his blessing in proportion to the trials endured. Spectators see the outer affliction, but not the inner blessing, and are amazed. As a certain man famous for his piety observed with some elegance, in connection with austere monastic life: 'There are many who see our crosses, but they do not see our anointings.'[273] They see a body reduced by vigils, fasts, and toils, they see the solitude and the abstinence from all pleasures, and yet they do not see with what delights the soul in that poor, weak body is refreshed as it thirsts for heaven.

But what now is the prize which is sought with so much hardship? 'The God of gods will be seen in Sion,' or as Jerome translates it: 'They will appear to the God of gods in Sion.' This is the reward offered in all contests; this is the end of all vows, the sum of happiness: 'Lord, show us your face, and we shall be saved.'[274] Philip too said: 'Show us the Father, and it will suffice us.'[275] And yet 'no one has ever seen God';[276] he is invisible to the eyes of the body, but he can be seen by a pure heart. Thus the Lord in the Gospel says that the pure of heart are blessed 'for they shall see God.'[277] The heart here is not the physical organ, the origin of life and of the blood, but signifies rather the human mind illuminated by faith. And God is sometimes seen by pure minds even in this life, but through a glass and by riddles[278] – and only in Sion. For outside the church no one can see God, for no one possesses a pure mind; if anyone thinks that they see him, they are deluded, having seen some phantasm, not God.

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273 Bernard *In dedicatione ecclesiae sermo* 1.5 PL 183 520
274 Ps 79:4, 8, 20/80:3, 7, 19
275 John 14:8
276 John 1:18
277 Matt 5:8
278 1 Cor 13:12

Now it is no ordinary blessedness to appear before the God of gods. What does it mean to appear before him? It means to come with complete trust before the gaze of him who knows all that is hidden in the human heart, which only a pure and completely untainted conscience dares to do. The wicked may see God, but to them his aspect, so lovely to the pious, will be terrible. God is the same – the eyes are different, as to sick eyes the light, which is pleasant to those in good health, is painful. 'For we are all to stand before the court of the supreme judge,'[279] from which there is no appeal. The soldier who has fulfilled his task in war obediently and with all his strength, the servant who has cleverly invested his master's talents,[280] comes with joy into the sight of his general and his master, for he will hear the words: 'Accept the crown of eternal life, and enter into the joy of your Lord.'[281] Happy is he who is not afraid to open his conscience to the Lord, saying with king Hezekiah 'I beseech you, Lord, remember, I pray you, how I have walked before you in truth and with a perfect heart, and I have done what is good in your eyes.'[282] And with like confidence that bravest of Christ's soldiers came before his emperor with the words: 'Behold, we speak before God in Christ.'[283] And again to the Corinthians, speaking of himself, he says: 'Not walking in cunning, nor tampering with God's word, but commending ourselves to every man's conscience before God in the making manifest of truth.'[284] And elsewhere: 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith; for the rest, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.'[285]

Surely this is indeed great happiness, to be capable of thus appearing before the God of gods in Sion, in the watchtower of the gospel's perfection. 'The God of gods' signifies the judge of all; whether you take these gods as the judges of the people, or those pious men to whom God's word was revealed, or the angels, who are also called *eloim*,[286] or those spirits and human servants of spirits who allowed themselves to be worshipped

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279 Rom 14:10
280 Matt 25:14ff; Luke 19:11ff
281 Cf James 1:12; Matt 25:21, 23.
282 Isa 38:3
283 2 Cor 2:17
284 2 Cor 4:2
285 2 Tim 4:7–8
286 Pseudo-Jerome, in commenting on Ps 8:6/8:5 (*Breviarium in psalmos* PL 26 [1845] 838C), remarks that instead of writing 'a little lower than the angels' (*malachim*), the psalmist has put 'than God' (*elohim*). Peter Lombard enlarges on the point in his commentary on the psalter PL 191 128B–130B.

as gods, still God alone is the 'God of gods,' the universal judge, as Psalm 81 bears witness: 'God has stood in the synagogue of the gods, he gives judgment in the midst of the gods,'[287] though he cannot be judged by any. Neither the sight of the angels, nor of the prophets, nor of any of the saints can convey true felicity to men; only the God of gods can do that. To conclude, it is God who gives his blessing, but he gives it to those who pray for it. He desires to be asked, not because he needs reminding, but so that by asking we may make ourselves more worthy of receiving a more generous blessing. For we appear before God also whenever we call on him with prayers that are pure, or give him thanks for the good things he has given us.

'Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob.' God is the God of angels, and hence he is called the God of hosts. He is also the God of those human beings who imitate the patriarch Jacob. When fighting with the angel, Jacob merited his blessing, and said: 'I have seen the Lord face to face, and my soul is made whole.' The next words are: 'Behold, O God our protector, and look upon the face of your Christ.' One who needs a protector has not yet attained perfect safety; he still fears the fiery darts of evil spirits, which are aimed at us from above. To counter these he beseeches the God of armies 'to be his shield'; this is Jerome's translation, where the Septuagint has *hyperaspistes*.[288] Although the power of demons is great, the Lord of hosts alone is more powerful than all of them together. If he will deign to be our shield, we need not fear any weapons. One who says 'The Lord is the protector of my life: whom shall I fear?'[289] and again elsewhere, 'Lord, you have girded us as with the shield of your good will'[290] is safely protected behind this shield. There is no man-made shield which will keep the whole body safe from injury; indeed, sometimes the shield itself may be the cause of the wearer's undoing. But if you are protected by God's shield, no part of your body can be wounded. To be looked on by God is to be protected by him, and he looks on those to whom he is well disposed and whom he wishes well. For this reason the psalm I have just quoted refers to a 'shield of good will.' (The Greek is εὐδοκία, which Jerome

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287 Ps 81/82:1

288 Literally, 'one who holds a shield over another,' hence a protector. Erasmus gives the Greek word in transliteration but offers no translation. He had given the title *Hyperaspistes* to a two-part work against Luther in 1526 and 1527 CWE 76 and 77.

289 Ps 26/27:1

290 Ps 5:13/5:12, with the alteration of 'girded' for Vulgate 'crowned'

translates as 'readiness to be pleased' [*placabilitas*].)[291] Those who protect themselves with their own merits, trusting in these as a shield, must work out for themselves whether they are safe or not. Those who place their trust in rituals, in the cult of the saints, and in dress,[292] as though these things gave them safety from Satan's attack, rely on a shield which is insufficiently trustworthy. Yet one may safely trust in God and in his promises. To look on God is blessedness, but we cannot look on him unless he has first looked on us. When we were wandering in a darkness worse than Cimmerian,[293] he thought it good to look on us; he opened our eyes, and, though we were his enemies,[294] by loving us he made us love him in return.

'Look upon the face of your Christ.' It is, I think, unnecessary to puzzle over whether this refers to David or as is generally agreed to some other person.[295] 'Christ' in Greek means 'anointed,' like 'Messiah' in Hebrew. All who are reborn in Christ are 'Christ,' and God will never turn his gaze from their countenance, but rather guard them as the apple of his eye,[296] so long as they do not themselves turn their face from him. But it is for kings and priests to be anointed, each in the manner that accords with his title, for St Peter declares: 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,' and so on.[297] But the Prince of all the Christs is he who is called the Prince of peace,[298] a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek,[299] whom alone 'God has anointed with the oil of joyfulness beyond his comrades.'[300] God the Father loves to look on his face, since it lacks any blemish, and he acknowledges him as his uniquely beloved Son, in whom he is

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291 Jerome *Psalterium iuxta hebraeos* PL 28 (1890) 1131

292 That is clerical or monastic status. Cf the colloquies Πτωχοπλούσιοι 'The Well-to-do Beggars' CWE 39 481–3 and *Exequiae Seraphicae* CWE 40 999–1013 and 1017 n18.

293 Cf Adagia II vi 34: *Cimmeriae tenebrae*.

294 The phrasing here recalls Romans 5:10.

295 This is discussed with reference to Jewish exegesis by Nicholas of Lyra *Postilla super Psalterium*, vol III in multi-volume Latin Bible sets. Possible candidates were Zorobabel or Nehemiah, assuming the psalm to have been composed at the time of the Babylonian captivity; to this it was objected that neither was anointed, and it was proposed that the reference is to David, the people making their prayers through his merits (cf 189 and n304 below). Nicholas concluded that it must refer to Jesus.

296 Ps 16/17:8

297 1 Pet 2:9

298 Isa 9:6

299 Ps 109/110:4, quoted at Heb 5:6

300 Heb 1:9

well pleased.[301] What then is the prophet's meaning when he says: 'Behold . . . and look upon the face of your Christ'? Everything which God lavishes on us, he gives through his Son and because of his Son, not because of the righteous deeds which we have performed. 'For we have all offended in many things,'[302] and he alone is the lamb wholly without spot.[303] And so, O God our protector, if our face (that is, our conscience) is displeasing to your eyes, look upon the face of Christ your Son, whom you love without reservation, and through his merits give us what we do not merit ourselves.

The Jews knew nothing of the mystery of the Incarnation, and so in their prayers, not trusting in their own deserts, they made their requests of God for the sake of the memory of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, whose piety was acceptable to God.[304] But Christians ask nothing from the Father except through Jesus Christ,[305] who is for us an advocate in heaven,[306] and who has given us his word that whatever we ask the Father in his name we should receive.[307] The writer of this psalm had not seen Christ in the flesh, but he had seen his coming from afar with the eyes of faith, in the same way that Abraham, born many centuries before Christ, had 'seen his day, and rejoiced.'[308] So whenever we ask God for something, let us ask with confidence, though deriving our confidence not from our good deeds but from Christ's freely given promises. Let us not say 'look at my fasts, my alms, my vigils; look how I sleep on the bare earth,' but 'look upon the face of your Christ.' Paul tells us this in Ephesians 3, saying 'in Jesus Christ our Lord we have trust and confidence of access,' in certainty which comes through faith in him.[309] What is the meaning of 'faith in him'? It means that we should trust him with all our heart, for he does not fail in his promises, even if they are such as seem to us impossible. Who would have believed that divine and human nature could thus come together and be united in one person? But God promised this and performed it. Who would believe it possible that a true man should sit at the right hand of

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301 Cf Matt 3:17, 17:5.
302 James 3:2
303 Cf Exod 12:5.
304 Exod 32:13, Moses' plea to the Lord to remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, is cited by Nicholas of Lyra in the context of this verse (*Postilla super Psalterium*, vol III in multi-volume Latin Bible sets).
305 John 14:6
306 Cf 1 John 2:1.
307 John 14:13
308 John 8:56
309 Eph 3:11–12

God the Father? He promised and performed it. What then may we not hope for from God, if only he will look on the face of his Christ?

To show that this interpretation is not a figment of my imagination, but that the prophet, recognizing his own worth for what it is, flees for refuge to the face of Christ, I may point out the words which follow: 'For one day in your courts is better than thousands.' There is no reason why we should not interpret these words in their less important sense with reference to the Jewish captivity in Babylon. Gripped by an immense longing for their own country, weary of the false religions of the pagans, they yearned for their old rites and the magnificent temple built by Solomon, and daily association with the pagans made them seem in their own eyes pagans themselves. However, I have preferred to pursue a less obvious line of interpretation. We are not told how many thousands, so that we understand an indefinite number. The text does not say 'in your house' or 'in your sanctuary' but 'in your courts,' that is, the temple forecourt, where even non-believers were admitted; so Paul in the letter to the Hebrews calls it a 'worldly sanctuary' (*κοσμικόν*), because it was open to the whole world.[310] Again, the Hebrew does not say 'one day,' but only 'day.' It cannot be called day where the light of the sun of righteousness[311] and of truth untainted is absent; consequently, there is no day anywhere except in the church. Outside, everyone is living in night, as Zechariah long since prophesied, when he spoke of non-believers in his last chapter: 'In that day there will be no light, but cold and ice.'[312] Next he says, referring to the church's faith: 'And it shall be one day acknowledged as the Lord's, neither day nor night.'[313] A day in the ordinary sense is brought about by sunrise, as sunset brings night: so what is this thing which is day and not day? The answer is given in Isaiah, chapter 60: 'You will have no sun for daylight, neither will the moon rise to shine upon you by night, but the Lord will be your everlasting light.'[314] The author of the Apocalypse drew on both these prophetic passages when he wrote: 'And the city will have no need of sunlight, for the Lord almighty will be a light to it.'[315] Furthermore, in the chapter from which I have just quoted, Isaiah shows that there is no light outside the church when, in

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310 Heb 9:1, given in Greek
311 Mal 4:1
312 Zech 14:6. Modern translations have, eg, 'On that day there shall be neither heat nor cold nor frost' (New English Bible).
313 Zech 14:7
314 Isa 60:19
315 Rev 21:23

dealing with those who have not received the faith of the gospel, he says: 'For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will rise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you.'[316] He goes on to speak of those who have abandoned the false religion they were brought up in and have come to believe in the gospel: 'And the nations will walk in your light, and kings in the splendour of your rising.'[317]

After this he says 'better than thousands.'[318] He does not say thousands of what, but includes all good things put together, which no one can find outside the church: since what happiness can there be for one walking in darkness? For as long as we are soldiers in this tabernacle, we perceive the sun through faith. But in the heavenly temple there is only one day, because there is 'no change, no alternation of darkness,'[319] and no cloud of error or ignorance to obscure the light. Eternity knows no rising or setting. Meanwhile, it is more fortunate than the possession of all the wealth, the power, the honours, and delights of this world to walk in the light of faith, and in simplicity of mind to follow him who said 'He who follows me does not walk in darkness.'[320] These words seem foolish to those whose eyes are yet unopened by Christ. But if you were to ask those upon whose hearts Christ's light has shone whether they would reject their devotion to gain the whole world, they would loathe and detest your words. They know the goodness of what they now hold as a pledge,[321] and the inestimable worth of that which they will presently reach.

Let me now consider the speaker's great desire for the house of God. 'I have chosen to lie cast down in the house of my God rather than dwell in the tents of sinners.' To lie cast down means to lie at the threshold or in the entrance hall like a beggar, exposed to the kicks of passers-by. But the church is so great and so blessed that the most despised position within her is far superior to all worldly glories. In the heavenly Jerusalem there are many mansions,[322] and the least of these is greater than all royal palaces put together. Similarly, whereas in the church, as in a large household, there are vessels of different kinds, some more precious than others, the least valuable of these vessels is of more value than the whole

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316 Isa 60:2
317 Isa 60:3
318 Here quoted in Greek, ὑπὲρ χιλιάδας
319 James 1:17
320 John 8:12
321 Cf 2 Cor 5:5.
322 Cf John 14:2.

world.[323] In the human body some members are more honoured than others; they perform different functions, but all are animated by the same spirit. So in Christ's mystical body, the church, there are different ranks of people, different gifts of the Spirit, and yet all are members of Christ and await the same inheritance.[324] Here the lowest thing is more exalted than any worldly heights. The human foot is preferable to the eye of a pig or a dog, and the human organs of excretion to a donkey's head.

At this point the prophet touches on the reason why so many people either do not come to the church, or leave it, or when expelled for some fault fail to return. Those who are swollen with worldly honours are unwilling to take off their camel humps and enter in at the low gateway.[325] History teaches us that many became founders of heresies because they were not promoted to the rank of bishop. They preferred to occupy the leading place among dogs and swine than to accept an ordinary position among Christ's sheep. This stupid, ambitious pride gave us Basilides, Marcion, and other unlucky names.[326] Yet what did those unfortunates gain? Among men they have achieved eternal disgrace; with God they have deserved hellfire. How much better to be the least conspicuous among the sheep of the church, if only your name is written in the book of life.[327] It is similarly senseless, when one has deserved by obvious and great crimes to be removed from the society of the church, if one then refuses to do penance and be readmitted. People like this believe themselves humiliated and cast down if they are forbidden entrance, if they stand in the porch with bare head and bare feet, and on bended knee beseech those who enter for their prayers; if in place of purple they wear sackcloth, if in place of perfumes they are smeared with ashes. Why so? Because they do not see the eminence, the happiness, and the freedom from care enjoyed by those whose time is spent in the courts of the Lord – or the humiliation and the danger involved for those who remain outside God's house even for an hour. The emperor Theodosius, that man dear to God, saw all this when he chose to relinquish the whole business of empire, and to go into a humble place of penance rather than to be outside the house of the Lord.[328]

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323 Cf 2 Tim 2:20.
324 Cf 1 Corinthians 12; for the idea of inheritance, see Ephesians 1.
325 For camels cf Matt 19:24, Mark 10:25, Luke 18:25; for the low gateway cf Matt 7:13–14, Luke 13:24, with perhaps a glance at John 10:1–9.
326 See n65 above.
327 Cf Phil 4:3.
328 After his defeat of Eugenius in 394 Theodosius (emperor 379–95) proclaimed

Those very penitents who lie like beggars on the threshold of the Lord's house, filthily dressed, thin and weak from fasting, consumed in sorrow and tears, are far more fortunate than those who rule under Satan in the tents of wickedness. The penitents, if they truly repent, may be physically outside the house of the church, but in spirit they are within.

What then does the prophet desire so passionately, appealing to God by the face of Christ? He wishes to be even in the remotest corner or on the threshold of God's house, and to be counted even among the most abject of Christ's members, for away from him no one has any hope of salvation. But if we approach or return to the threshold of God's house, the Lord's mercy awaits us to be a support to our weakness, so that we may progress to greater perfection; the Lord's truth awaits us, so that we may be full of all spiritual knowledge; the Lord's grace awaits us, to enrich us with spiritual blessings; finally, the Lord's glory awaits us, to remake us in the image of Christ. Christ is truth, and Christ is our righteousness. If we follow him as he goes on ahead, Isaiah's words are brought to pass: 'And your righteousness shall go before you, and the glory of the Lord shall shield you.'[329] His mercy pardons your errors, his truth illumines your mind and prevents you from repeating them; his grace bestows on you the gifts of the Spirit, so that you may 'turn again and strengthen your brothers,'[330] and recall from wickedness as many as you can. Thus when David had experienced the Lord's great mercy and was called back by Nathan to the truth,[331] he said 'I will teach the wicked your ways, and sinners will return to you.'[332] All this is the prophet's intent when he says: 'For God loves mercy and truth, and the Lord will give grace and glory.' In this way Paul was through the Lord's mercy called back from the madness of persecution, and by the truth of the gospel he was taught the way of the Lord. Then through the grace of the Holy Spirit he was enriched with exceedingly great gifts and made a vessel and a chosen instrument,[333] and so he progressed to the stage where even in the midst of afflictions he could glory in the Lord.

However, this line can also be taken in another way, as meaning that it is by the divine mercy that we are drawn to the knowledge of truth, as

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his son Honorius emperor under the guardianship of Stilicho, and retired to Mediolanum (Milan) for the few remaining months of his life.

329 Isa 58:8
330 Luke 22:32
331 2 Kings/2 Sam 12:1–14, but especially the heading of Psalm 50/51
332 Ps 50:15/51:13
333 Cf Acts 9:15.

it says in Jeremiah 31: 'Therefore in my pity I have drawn you to me.'[334] Then the 'truth' is that of one who acknowledges his wrongdoing and recognizes God's freely given mercy. This is also expressed in Psalm 50: 'For behold, you have loved truth, and you have shown me the hidden secrets of your wisdom.'[335] All the time that David concealed his sin he was false, and he tried to deceive not men only but God. But God in his mercy called him back to acknowledge the truth through Nathan the prophet, making it clear how useless it is to hide one's sin from men, when no one can escape the sight of God. After the mercy which calls back the sinner, and the truth which makes confession, follow grace and glory. When the grief of penitence is over, and the members have thus been chastised, so that where previously they served wickedness for wickedness, they now become a temple of the Holy Spirit and serve righteousness for righteousness,[336] then the church may glory in a superabundance of grace where there was once an abundance of sin.[337] There is more rejoicing over the return of one sinner than over ninety-nine righteous.[338]

Again, the interpretation of Augustine, taking truth as referring to God's faithfulness to his promises, is far from absurd.[339] Truth belongs to God alone; 'all men are false,'[340] not because human beings are always deceitful, but because it is not in their power to carry out what they promise when they do not even know if they will live to see the next day. But all the while that we carry around with us this poor mortal body, susceptible as it is to so many injuries and dangers, God's mercy protects us like a shield, and prevents us from falling into wrongdoing. God's truth in his promises strengthens and supports our minds, and enables us to despise equally the good and bad circumstances of this life, and to reach the things above. This sentiment is also expressed in Psalm 35: 'Extend your mercy over those who know you, and your justice over them of upright heart.'[341] Justice gives everyone what is due to him; but what should God thus give to us, when he owes nothing to anyone? For we possess nothing which we ought not to regard as due to his kindness. Generosity, though, is not the same as

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334 Jer 31:3
335 Ps 50:8/51:6
336 Cf Rom 6:19; for the temple of the Spirit, cf 1 Cor 3:16.
337 Cf Rom 5:20.
338 Luke 15:7
339 Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 83* PL 37 1067
340 Ps 115:2/116:11; Rom 3:4
341 Ps 35:11/36:10

justice. But it is also a kind of justice to supply the things you have freely promised, and in this way God has in a sense made himself our debtor; we may not ask him anything for the sake of our own merits, but we may beseech him by his promises. Indeed, if we are mindful of our duty, he will not refuse the name of unjust should he not do as he has promised. As it is written: 'Come and accuse me, says the Lord.'[342] David refers to the justice of God in this sense with the words 'So that you are justified in your sayings, and are victorious when you give judgment.'[343] God sometimes acts later than we expect, but he never fails us, although in the meantime those who are ignorant of his truth are sceptical and whisper against him, like the two disciples who said 'We had hoped that he would redeem Israel';[344] or indeed like the disciples in the midst of their great grief when, not believing that he would rise again, they thought themselves the victims of deception.[345]

At this point Jerome's version of the Hebrew, and that of others, differs from the Septuagint, and in such a way that it appears not to be one of those variants where the same sentiment is expressed in different ways, or where different scholars take the same words in different senses. Rather, it seems that the Hebrew reading varied in different manuscripts. This occurs sometimes when a copyist or commentator is misled by some similarity and creates a false reading, or when a different spacing of the letters results in a different sense. The translation from the Hebrew reads: 'For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory.' If this reading is at all related, we have 'sun' instead of the 'truth' which is Christ, 'who gives light to every man that comes into this world,'[346] and 'shield' for the 'mercy' which protects those who believe against every attack of Satan. Psalm 31 similarly has 'Mercy will surround those who trust in the Lord.'[347] But Paul also urges us to take up the shield of faith,[348] and another psalm says 'His truth will surround you with a shield, nor will you fear the terror of the night.'[349] Do you wish to be protected from all evil? Then do not be carried about with every wind of doctrine.[350] Rather

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342 Isa 1:18
343 Ps 50:6/51:4
344 Luke 24:21
345 Cf Matt 28:17; Mark 16:13; Luke 24:11.
346 John 1:9
347 Ps 31/32:10
348 Eph 6:16
349 Ps 90/91:5
350 Eph 4:14

let us with a strong faith hold to that which the Catholic church has transmitted to us from Holy Scripture; let us with simple obedience keep the church's precepts, and with keen hope let us await the fulfilment of the church's promises. Those who walk in simplicity will not lack for mercy or truth or grace, or any other good thing to make them blessed. So the psalm continues: 'The Lord will not take good things from those who walk in innocence.' The Septuagint here translates 'innocence' as ἐν ἀκακίᾳ, which signifies rather a simplicity free of all deceit and malice. The Holy Spirit loves those souls which are simple, like doves:[351] here he will give them the glory of an unspotted conscience; in the world to come he will give them that glory which cannot be expressed. In the meantime be content with so precious a pledge and await the good things of the world to come, rejoicing in hope, so that sincerely and in truth you may say with the prophet: 'O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who places his hope in you.'

This sentiment forms the concluding verse of several of the psalms, and indeed words which should be fixed in our minds ought often to be repeated. The Second Psalm ends: 'Blessed are all those who trust in him.'[352] The Fourth Psalm: 'For you alone, Lord, have placed me in hope.'[353] The Twenty-sixth: 'Await the Lord, be of good courage; let your heart be strengthened, and await the Lord.'[354] The Thirtieth: 'Be of good courage, let your heart be strengthened, all you who place your hope in the Lord.'[355] The Thirty-second: 'We have placed our hope in his holy name.'[356] The Thirty-third: 'Those who place their hope in him will not do wrong.'[357] The Thirty-sixth: 'He will save those who have placed their hope in him.'[358] Psalms 41 and 42 also urge us to place our hope in God, and Psalms 63 and 130 are similar.[359] But this is no ordinary hope in which the Holy Scriptures so encourage us. The farmer hopes that God will give him an abundant harvest, the sailor hopes for a successful voyage, the pregnant woman hopes for a safe delivery, the sick person for recovery. But the devout man, whose hope is true hope – that is, who has placed all his hope in the Lord – gives all his worries to God with complete trust, confident that in prosperity and in

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351 Cf Matt 10:16.
352 Ps 2:13/2:12
353 Ps 4:10/4:8
354 Ps 26/27:14
355 Ps 30:25/31:24
356 Ps 32/33:21 (the penultimate verse)
357 Ps 33:24/34:22
358 Ps 36/37:40 ('*because* they take refuge in him')
359 Ps 41:12/42:11, Ps 42/43:5, Ps 63:11/64:10, Ps 130/131:3

adversity, in death and in life, all will end in good, through the mercy of God who so governs human affairs in his inscrutable wisdom. Therefore, O Lord of hosts, since that man is blessed who has placed all his trust in you, and since this may happen only within your dwelling place the church, grant, I beseech you, to open the eyes of us all, so that seeing how lovely, how beautiful, how peaceful, secure, and blessed are your tabernacles, and how different are the tabernacles of wickedness, we may lay aside our differences of opinion and feeling, and, being in agreement in the same mind and the same opinion, we may so pass our days in that blessed society of all the saints that it may truly be said of us: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'[360]

But we shall never come together in unity if we do not all alike place our hope in Christ Jesus our Lord, King of Sion, and all look to him alone. Where ambition, love of money, obstinacy, mindless partisanship, or hate more mindless still are sovereign, so that we are desperate to defend anything we have once maintained in speech or writing; or when to favour one faction we give our approval to things we know do not deserve it, or to gratify a private enmity we condemn even pious sentiments; in fact when everyone looks to himself, and the rope of contention is pulled in all directions in a tug-of-war, it is impossible for harmony to be restored. We should remind ourselves how stupid it is to indulge in such loathing of the behaviour of certain popes or priests or monks that we become worse than they; for it is worse to leave the fellowship of the church and take oneself off to heresy or schism than to lead an impure life while remaining sound in doctrine. Moreover, it is the height of injustice that we should be as sharp-sighted as Lynceus[361] where the vices of others are concerned, when we are blinder than moles to our own faults, seeing the mote in the eyes of others, yet all the while carrying around a beam in our own.[362] We are human, and we deal with human beings. Of course, those who are appointed to public office and neglect their duty are the worst offenders, but nonetheless the obstinacy of the people is often part of the reason why those in power are other than they should be; in this way the people of

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360 Ps 132/133:1. This long and formal prayer would typically mark the end of a psalm commentary, but here Erasmus uses it to mark the transition from the commentary proper to his proposals for ending the split in the church. The effect is one of shock as the pious and rhetorical climax is undercut by a vivid evocation of the human failings which stand in the way of the prayer's object.

361 *Adagia* II i 54: *Lynceo perspicacior*

362 Cf Matt 7:3.

Israel in place of the mild Samuel received Saul with all his arrogance.[363] If first one examines one's own failings, one is readier to condone those of others. A prime breeding ground of discord is our habit of scrutinizing our neighbours' faults with the left eye only. That left eye should be closed, and the right eye opened in its turn to their merits. If we make an honest estimate of people's virtues, we shall be less troubled by their vices. Between brother and brother, between wife and husband, there can be no cordial relations if each party does not in turn close its eyes to the other's faults. So how will peace be preserved in the whole church, if everyone is blind to the virtues of others, while when it comes to vices he has eyes like those mirrors which reflect faces much larger and uglier than the reality? It is a matter for deep regret that so many monks have so little of religion beyond their dress and their frigid rituals, that so many priests do not live in chastity or devote themselves to the study of the Scriptures, and that not a few abbots and bishops differ very little from secular rulers and princelings. But meanwhile we overlook how many of them are pious, chaste and learned men, well-deserving of the state, among riches poor, in high office modest, in positions of power merciful. We do not consider how much harsher we ourselves should be if we had so many opportunities to abuse our position.

It would be a good thing, then, for the common people, who pass over the virtues of priests, seeing only their vices, and those in an exaggerated version, to 'bring their knapsack to the front and look at it.'[364] To start from the bottom: how many craftsmen are honest in accomplishing their work and fair in selling it? Not for nothing did that saying come into being, so well known in the vernacular: 'every craftsman's a thief in his own craft.'[365] Is there any product which they do not spoil in their quest for gain? How many ways are there of adulterating wheat and flour, wine and beer, clothes and other textiles? I need not mention the cheating promises, the arrogance, and bad manners displayed in these dealings, which make it almost more pleasant to transact business with a king or a cardinal than with a stonecutter who barely has the materials for a meal in his home. If

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363 1 Kings/1 Sam 8:4ff

364 Cf *Adagia* I vi 90: *Non videmus manticae quod in tergo est*.

365 Given as a Dutch proverb in Joannes Sartorius *Adagiorum chiliades tres* (Antwerp 1561) 295r. A partial parallel is *Adagia* III vii 19: *Ad suum quemque quaestum aequum est esse callidum*, though in commenting on this Erasmus does not take the opportunity as here to castigate cheating craftsmen and traders, elsewhere a favourite theme (cf *In psalmum 22* CWE 64 177; *De puritate tabernaculi* 255 below).

people are like this when employed in base and servile crafts, how would they be likely to behave if they were raised to the dignity of those whose ways they cannot tolerate? The common herd make much of the unchastity of priests and monks, speaking of 'incest,' 'sacrilege,' and 'violated vows,' while they pretend to themselves that they are free and bound by nothing. But let them make no mistake: no Christian is free to sin. All are bound by a most solemn sacrament, unless perhaps they think that their baptismal promises are a joke. They call those who leave the orders of Benedict or Francis by the dreadful name of apostate: but how much more worthy of that name are those who have at their baptism professed contempt of the world, yet devote their whole being to the service of the world, passing from the army of Christ to that of Satan. The crime of adultery was punished by the pagans with the sword and by the Jews with stoning. Neither thought it a matter for levity, but now it is considered humorous. If one looks closer, one finds everything full of deceit, violence, and perjury; and I need not mention how enormous is the sink of iniquity covered by the shade of war. We need not speak here of the lesser magistrates, or of those who suppose that their noble title permits them to do anything, or of other rulers.[366] Wherever you turn your eyes, there is a vast supply of material for complaints. But this is human nature, which like the sea brings much with it which you would prefer not to have. Often it changes its faults, but it never abandons them. What then is left but for each one of us to examine himself and for all to take refuge in the mercy of Christ?

Some faults are too trivial for the beneficial application of a violent remedy. Some are better ignored, with less hurt to religion, than stirred up. Moreover, those which are actually too serious to be properly disregarded need a skilful and practised hand; otherwise we may experience what happens to unskilled doctors, who apply their medicines ham-fistedly and put an end to the patient, not the disease, or render a trivial illness incurable. Most abuses have crept in gradually, when there was an opportunity, and these should be removed gradually, when there is an opportunity, if this can be done without serious disorder breaking out. If this is not possible, we should ignore their existence until with the passage of time a better opportunity presents itself. The same careful skill should be applied to matters of doctrine. There are those who by shouting furiously 'Heresy, heresy! To the fire, to the fire!,' putting the worse interpretation on words that are ambiguous and slanderously misrepresenting true religious sentiment, have

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366 'other': Added in the second edition

actually provoked much sympathy for those they judged worthy of death. Again, those who use the commendable name of the gospel to put forward ideas completely opposed to the gospel have given much assistance to the faction they wish to see destroyed. One side allows nothing to be changed, the other leaves nothing alone; a storm has arisen which can scarcely be quieted, while the rope of contention is pulled this way and that, until eventually it breaks and each side falls flat on its back.[367] Not that the church can collapse, for it is built on the unmoving rock of Christ and cannot be shaken by any storm.[368] I am speaking merely of certain people who defend the church's cause with what is indeed great zeal – I will not call their zeal wrong, but rather ill informed. This sickness has not yet reached the stage where it becomes incurable; this fire can still be put out if we remove the material it feeds on. Now the chief source of this disorder is man's evil behaviour. We have no business throwing the blame onto others. The parents of the human race provided the first example of this habit, wicked in itself and inauspicious for us: 'The woman deceived me' – 'The serpent deceived me.'[369] All of us have provoked the Lord's anger, and it now remains for all of us, of one accord, to turn to him in sincerity. He is responsive to prayer, and he too will turn to us, and transform this chaotic tide of events into calm and quiet, if we devote our own small strength to the same end.

'But how will this come about?' it will be asked. Let each one of us be what he ought to be. Popes must be true popes, the vicars of Christ, caring for the Lord's flock in all sincerity. Princes must be true princes, the ministers of divine justice; they must remember that they will have to render account to God, and they should fear him all the more the more freedom they have from the fear of men. Elected magistrates must serve the state honestly. Monks must display in their behaviour the perfection they profess in their names. Priests must 'spend day and night in contemplation of God's law,'[370] so that they may be the salt of the people.[371] As for

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367 The tug-of-war image, already alluded to, 197 above, is an elaboration of *Adagia* I v 67: *Funem obrumpere nimium tendendo*, where it is simply pulling too much in one direction which breaks the rope.

368 Christ is a rock at 1 Cor 10:4, but the church is more usually said to be founded on the rock of Peter (whether symbolizing the papacy or Christians in general), with reference to Matt 16:18. In his *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* ASD VI-5 248 Erasmus rejects Augustine's suggestion that the rock in Matthew is Christ.

369 Cf Gen 3:12–13.

370 Ps 1:2

371 Cf Matt 5:13.

the laity, they must correspond to their name; they must not take a leading place, but obey the priesthood with reverence, faithfully adhere to the laws of secular rulers, and each in his own livelihood must clear his conscience before the Highest, who knows the secrets of our hearts – to use St Luke's words freely.[372] Let the merchant exchange his merchandise honestly; the miller be a miller in honesty; the baker an honest baker; the smith an honest smith; the dealer in clothes an honest clothes-dealer, placing his trust in him who does not fail those of upright heart; and so on with the rest. No one should excuse his faults with the pretext 'this is customary' or 'everyone does this.' Dear friend, you should not look around you to see what others are doing; rather consider what is required from you by the supreme judge, whose sight no one may deceive, at whose judgment seat we all must stand,[373] whether we are kings or poor peasants. There your excuse 'this is customary – everyone does this' will be of no avail. Meanwhile, let us abandon our ambition and our passion and determination for scoring points. Let us dismiss our partisanship together with our private hatreds. Let the noise of insane quarrels, neither side heeding the other, be silenced, and so at last let that truth which brings peace shine out. And let the spirit of accommodation[374] also be present, so that each side may make some concessions to the other, for without this there can be no concord. But it must not reach the point where it alters things which are unalterable,[375] and human weakness must be tolerated only so that it may gradually be called to greater perfection.

But all of us must keep firmly fixed in our minds that it is neither safe nor conducive to concord to abandon rashly those things handed down to us by the authority of our forebears and established by the usage and agreement of many centuries. No innovation should be made unless it is urged by necessity or commended by extreme expedience. Take the freedom of the will.[376] This is a controversy more productive of thorns than

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372 Acts 1:24; cf 15:8. Erasmus uses the Greek word καρδιογνώστης for 'knower of hearts.'

373 Cf Rom 14:10.

374 Erasmus uses the Greek word συγκατάβασις (*synkatabasis*), literally equivalent to 'condescension,' a term much used by the Greek Fathers, especially Chrysostom (eg *Homily* 17.1 on Gen 3:8 PG 53 133). In patristic use it indicated divine consideration of and adaptation to human weakness.

375 Literally 'immovable,' given in Greek (τὰ ἀκίνητα); the *akineta* are distinguished from *adiaphora* 'indifferent matters.'

376 Erasmus himself of course had engaged in controversy with Luther on this very subject, in his *De libero arbitrio* (1524) CWE 76 and *Hyperaspistes* books 1

of fruit, and if it is necessary to investigate any aspect of it, it should be discussed soberly in theological debates.[377] Meanwhile, it is enough for us to agree that man can do nothing of his own resources, and that if he is able to accomplish anything whatsoever, he owes it all to the grace of him by whose gift we are whatever we are; so that in all things we may acknowledge our weakness and glorify the mercy of the Lord. Let us agree that very much is to be attributed to faith, so long as we concede that faith too is granted only by the Holy Spirit, and extends far wider than most people think,[378] although it is not possessed by everyone who says: 'I believe that Christ suffered for me.' Let us agree that the hearts of believers are justified, that is, purified, by faith, so long as we acknowledge that works of charity are necessary to gain salvation. For true faith cannot be idle; it is the source of all good works. We should rather make a distinction between the righteousness which purifies the dwelling of our mind, which should properly be called innocence, and the righteousness which ornaments and enriches the other with good works.[379] Properly speaking, God is in no one's debt, unless it be from the promise he made freely. Although it is true that his generosity is the cause even for our fulfilling the conditions of our promise, we should not reject the words 'worth' or 'merits,' since God accepts and reckons up in his goodness whatever he works in us or through us. There should be no dispute over the words while we agree on the reality, and meanwhile the mass of the people, who are without experience in such matters, should not be bombarded with these paradoxes.[380] 'The quality of our works has no significance, but only have faith and you will be saved'; 'Whatever man's deeds, he can do nothing but sin' – these sayings are true in a certain sense, but the inexperienced take them in a sense that is undesirable. The same is true of the words 'Christ hung on the cross for our sins.' Did he die for us so that we might live in our

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and 2 (1526 and 1527 respectively) CWE 76 and 77. His position allowed for more human freedom than did Luther's.

377 Compare Erasmus' words to Pflug, Ep 2522 (Allen IX 319:31–3); in both cases he is recommending that the matter be settled by a committee of experienced theologians.

378 Compare the well-known saying in the colloquy *Convivium Religiosum* CWE 39 192: 'Perhaps the spirit of Christ is more widespread than we understand, and the company of saints includes many not in our calendar.' See also CWE 63 Introduction lxx.

379 For this 'double righteousness,' *iustitia duplex*, applied to faith and works, see *In psalmum 22* CWE 64 152 and n194 and Introduction xiii.

380 'Paradoxes' is in Greek in the original, recalling the 'paradoxes' of Stoic ethics.

sins, or rather so that, once washed by his blood, we might abstain from all impurity?[381] He died and rose again that we might imitate him and die to sin, rising again to newness of life. He bore his cross for us, but it is also he who declares: 'Who does not take up his cross every day is not worthy of me.'[382] But those who every day, in so far as they can, crucify the Lord with their sins, will find that his death, so far from being of benefit to them, will result in a serious increase in their punishment.

The belief that the prayers and good works of the living can help the dead, especially if they made such arrangements in their lifetime, is characteristic of a certain religious disposition. But people who decree for themselves funeral processions and masses for the sake of show should be warned that they are wasting their money. Their profit would be more certain if the money which they bequeath at their death were spent for religious purposes while they were alive and well. Still, those who do not share this belief should not carp at the simple faith of others; rather, in proportion as they refuse to believe that the actions of the living help the dead, they should with all the more good will relieve the wants of the poor, and all the more ardently apply themselves to good works.

It is also a truly religious impulse to believe that the saints, whom, while they were still burdened with mortal bodies, God esteemed so highly that he would cast out devils and restore the dead to life in response to their prayers, now too have some influence with him. But those who take a different view should pray in purity and sincere faith to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and refrain from harassing in a hateful way those who without superstition implore the aid of the saints. Such superstition, which I agree is present in quantity in prayers and worship associated with the saints, ought to be shown up for what it is; but in the meantime a simple and pious disposition should be tolerated, even if it might be combined with some error. If the saints do not hear our prayers, Christ will hear them. He loves simple souls, and he will give us what we ask, if not through the saints, at least in place of the saints.

Those who have meted out savage treatment to images of the saints have not been moved to such passion without reason, though their ardour may be excessive, in my view at least. Idolatry, or the worship of images, is a terrible crime, and although it was long ago rooted out from human custom, there is still a danger that if we are careless we may slip back into the same state through the devices of evil spirits. On the other hand, sculpture and

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381 The argument of this and the following sentence paraphrases Rom 6:1–11.

382 A conflation of Matt 10:38, Luke 9:23, and several similar passages

painting were once considered among the liberal arts as a 'silent poetry,'[383] and they sometimes convey more to human emotions than can be expressed in words even of the greatest eloquence. Plato agreed that poetry was of the greatest importance in determining whether the state was well run or not. He did not banish all poets from his Republic, but only Homer and similar poets who attributed to the gods or their sons adulteries, love affairs with boys, lies, deceit, uncontrollable anger, quarrels, and other disgraceful behaviour which no good governor of a state would tolerate in his citizens, or sober householder in his wife, children, or servants.[384] In the same way the superstition which has gradually accumulated because of images should be eliminated, while their useful aspects should be preserved. Would that on all walls of all buildings there were fitting depictions of the life of Christ! But in churches, parallel to the decree of the African Council 'that nothing may be read but the canonical Scriptures,'[385] it is expedient that there be no paintings whose subject is outside the canonical Scriptures. In peristyles, porticoes, and colonnades other historical subjects may be painted, if they are conducive to good morals. Nonetheless, ridiculous, obscene, or subversive paintings ought to be eliminated not only from churches but from every part of the state. There is a type of blasphemy which consists in perverting Holy Scripture for the sake of stupid and irreverent jokes. It is similarly worthy of severe punishment to introduce into paintings of scriptural themes absurd elements of one's own invention, quite unworthy of their holy subjects. If people want to play foolish games, they should take their subjects from Philostratus.[386] On the other hand, pagan literature contains many subjects which could with profit be placed before the eyes of ordinary people.

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383 This commonplace was quoted several times by Plutarch (ascribed to Simonides in *Moralia* 346F) and alluded to often in Roman authors. Compare also the discussion of *enargeia* in *De copia* CWE 24 577, which is said to consist in making the description of a subject like a picture (the word implies 'clear vision').

384 Plato rejects the telling of such myths in book 2 of the *Republic* 377ff. His criticism in book 10 is more radical, being based on the proposition that imitation (*mimesis*) is necessarily inferior to the original. He concludes that the only sorts of poetry which the city should allow are 'hymns to the gods and praises of the good.'

385 This was decreed at the synod of Hippo in 393.

386 There were two related authors named Philostratus in the second and third centuries, both authors of *Eikones* or *Imagines*, collections of descriptions of subjects for painting, mostly mythological.

So those who believe that no honour should be attached to representations of the saints, since they are void of perception, should be allowed to persist in their opinion, but they should not criticize those who without superstition revere such images for love of what they represent, in the same way as the bride, for love of her absent husband, may kiss the ring or garment which he has left or sent her.[387] This emotion, coming as it does not from superstition but from an abundance of love, cannot be displeasing to God. We should take the same view of those people who with a like attitude kiss the bones or other relics of saints. I imagine that Paul would agree in these matters that 'everyone should remain in his own opinion.'[388] A theologian of my acquaintance once caught sight of a man walking through a graveyard, which happened to be a public route, who failed to raise his hat in front of a crucifix, not from any deliberate intent, but because he was absorbed in the conversation of the friends who were walking with him. The theologian turned to his companions and declared with extraordinary vehemence: 'I would take an oath that that man is a Lutheran.' That was certainly wrong; just as the other side sins when in a spirit of hatred they criticize what is not superstition but a simple and religious disposition which attributes some value to images. But everyone may without injury be reminded that the best reverence which can be given to the saints is to imitate their lives.

Again, those who are not convinced that the sacramental confession of our own time was instituted by Christ himself should preserve it as a beneficial practice, useful in many ways and commended by the usage of centuries.[389] But its safety and acceptability are largely up to us; we should choose a priest who is uncorrupted, learned, and who can keep silence, and we should not waste his time by using roundabout or ambiguous expressions, so that he is forced to interrogate us and as it were to fish out our faults. Instead, in a straightforward manner, as before God, we should reveal at least those things which constitute mortal wounds, such

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387 The same comparison is used in the colloquy Ἰχθυοφαγία 'A Fish Diet' CWE 40 684, but there it is used to illuminate the rejection of types and symbols when the reality has been revealed.

388 Rom 14:5

389 For Erasmus' views on confession, see the treatise *Exomologesis* LB V 146ff. In the colloquy *Confabulatio pia* CWE 39 96–7 and n53 the devout boy Gaspar confesses his sins every day to Christ and says that this would be sufficient for him if the rulers of the church agreed. He confesses to a priest only before receiving communion, and then briefly, mentioning only what he knows or suspects to be grave offences. See also the very full treatment in Payne 181–216.

as adultery, murder, theft, extreme and deliberate drunkenness, malicious slander (which is a kind of murder), perjury, fraud, violence, and other things of this sort, whether they have actually been performed or firmly resolved – since those who lack only the opportunity have already performed their sinful act. But let us not feel the superstitious need to repeat our confession; let us not be overanxious in reckoning up our sins and their exact circumstances, or worry whether we should make our whole confession over again to another priest if we have forgotten some fault the first time round. Our most important concern ought to be that we loathe the faults we have confessed and that we return to our original disposition. But the fundamental point is to live our lives in such a way that we do not fall into any mortal sin; anyone who can manage this is free from the necessity of confession. Scarcely anyone is able to avoid minor faults in this life, but with God's help it is not difficult for someone rooted in the love of God and his neighbour to avoid real sins. Consequently, it is necessary above all to lay these foundations and make them secure in our souls. Then if it happens that we slip into sin, we need not rush straight off to a priest, but we should immediately turn to God. We must straightway return to his favour, though we can wait for an opportunity to confess to a priest. But it is sensible also, when opportunity presents itself, to reveal to a priest those faults where you are in doubt if they are real sins or not. The same applies to deeds where you are uncertain whether or not they are lawful; human life produces many complicated circumstances, for instance in matters of finance or marriage, of making amends, and of vows. Those who believe that confession in its present form was instituted by Christ should observe it with all the more reverence, while allowing others their own view, until a sacred council makes some more explicit pronouncement on the matter.[390] In this way Christian concord will not be completely shattered, and the morals of the weak will not fall into total licence.

As for the mass, it is perfectly reasonable to correct whatever superstitions or distasteful features may have crept in. But I fail to see why we should so vilify the mass itself, consisting as it does of psalmody, called the introit, a doxology, a prayer, canticles, a reading from the prophets or the apostles (called the epistle), a reading from the gospel, the profession of the catholic faith, the giving of thanks, called Eucharist, and the reverent com-

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390 Like many others, Erasmus seems to have been convinced at this date that a council was necessary to resolve the crisis in the church: see Ep 2522 (August 1531) to Pflug, n377 above). See also Jedin I 245–67.

memoration of our Lord's death, then more prayers, including the Lord's prayer; after this follows the sign of Christian peace, then communion, another canticle, and a prayer. Finally the priest entrusts and commends the whole congregation, gathered together as it were in his charge, to God's blessing, asking that they may remain disposed to piety and mutual love. What is there here that is lacking in religion, or not to be revered? Those who dislike the filthy crowd of petty hired priests should remove the unworthy and keep the rest. Those who have no taste for sequences,[391] especially of the unlearned sort, are at liberty to remove them, the Roman church not being acquainted with sequences. Likewise the chant sung now in some churches after the consecration, for peace, or against pestilence, or for a plentiful harvest, could be omitted without any harm to religion. It was introduced altogether contrary to ancient custom; for in those days the congregation would not run up to see what the priest displayed, but rather, bowing their bodies to the ground and raising their souls to heaven, they gave thanks to Christ our Redeemer, who has washed us with his blood and redeemed us by his death. Again, the Roman church knows nothing of this; in the pope's chapel there is only one altar and one mass. Even today many churches following the Roman custom do not allow priests to say mass privately, at least during the celebration of high mass. We must condemn the arrogance of those who wander round chattering about trivial matters during high mass and then demand their own priest to say their own mass; or who at vespers snatch at any priest they find and make him say vespers apart for them, even if he has already finished his own. Should he refuse, they become so angry that they will almost punch him in the face. This is the extent of the general contempt for what is public and passion for what is private.

Those who do not care for elaborate music, including instrumental passages, in church may omit this without any detriment to religion; but if it is found acceptable, then care should be taken to see that this music, too, is suitable to the place where God is worshipped. The practice in certain churches whereby the musical performance causes the most important elements to be omitted or curtailed is far from correct. The sequence may take nearly an hour, while the creed is cut short and the Lord's prayer omitted.

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391 Sequences or proses were verses introduced into the liturgy from the tenth century onwards as a supplement to the established chants. They became more elaborate and more numerous, until reduced by the Council of Trent to four (including the *Dies irae* and *Veni sancte Spiritus*).

The type of vocal ornament which draws out the end of each line consumes a vast amount of time, yet the important thing used to be that solemn worship should not be made tedious by superfluous elements.[392]

All those special masses – the mass of the crown of thorns, of the three nails, of the foreskin of Christ, masses for those travelling by sea, by foot, or on horseback, for women barren, pregnant, or in labour, for those suffering from quartan or tertian fevers – are verging on superstition.[393] It is not difficult either to tolerate or to correct much of this type. But there was no need for us to reject the mass itself, accepted for so many centuries, as though it were something abhorrent and impious. The old questions of qualification, of principal and secondary merit, *opus operans* and *opus operatum*,[394] might be classified with opinions of human origin, again until a

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392 The vocal ornament in question is probably the *melisma*, where one syllable is drawn out into many notes. Among 'those who do not care for elaborate music' Erasmus clearly includes himself. In several places (notably *In epistolam ad Corinthios primam annotationes* CWE 43 166, *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-4 272, 550) he clearly expresses his disapproval of contemporary polyphonic religious music. The latter passage, published in 1535, is particularly close to the text here. See Margolin especially 48–56.

393 Votive masses such as those for travellers or the sick are found in the early sacramentaries and were well established in the Middle Ages and retained after the Council of Trent. Erasmus perhaps exaggerates in suggesting that different types of sickness each had a special mass associated. Similarly, the mass of the crown of thorns is genuine (known today from John Taverner's sixteenth-century setting of the *Missa Corona Spinea*), but the nails and the foreskin look like baroque exaggeration.

394 These theological niceties are mentioned in the context of the mass, but can also be applied more widely. Principal and secondary merit must refer to what are more often called condign (*de condigno*) and congruent (*de congruo*) merit; the distinction is between merit from actions which fully and properly deserve their reward, and merit applied by divine generosity as a kind of reward for effort. For further discussion, see CWE 76 lxxxii–lxxxiii. The phrase *ex opere operato* 'from the work performed' is used in the theology of the mass to point out that the sacrament resides in the proper performance of words and actions, not in any disposition of priest or congregation, but it is also used in connection with justification and penance to refer to recompense for wrongdoing made by the proper performance of a penance formally imposed. Its contrasting partner is *opus operans* 'the work performing' (usually and more clearly in later times *opus operantis* 'work of the performer'), indicating the position denied above in eucharistic theology, but also recompense through the patient bearing of sufferings and/or self-imposed penance. The distinction is mentioned in this form also among the pointless scholastic subtleties in *Moria* 53 ASD IV-3 152–4 (see C. Miller's note) / CWE 27 128.

council pronounces on these matters or leaves them to individual choice. As for the word 'sacrifice' or 'immolation,' the Doctors of the church in former times expressed no horror at this.[395] Christ having died once dies no more, I agree;[396] but that one sacrifice is as it were daily renewed in mystic rites as we continue to draw fresh grace from that perennial spring. Our appeal for the living and the dead made to the Father by his Son's death is our sacrifice of the victim on their behalf. Moreover, the word 'sacrifice' properly applies to all prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, so that it is particularly appropriate for the mass, which contains all these elements.

Some demand that there should be communion during mass. This was indeed the practice instituted by Christ, and once habitually observed. But if it is no longer so, this is nothing to do with the clergy, but rather with the laity, whose love, alas, has grown cool.[397] The heavenly food must not be thrust on the unwilling, or on those who regard it with disgust; but to those who seek it eagerly it will not be denied. But as it is, what sort of communion can there be when in some places the churches are practically empty at the time of communion? Some go home as soon as they have been asperged, making their exit before the introit. Others leave when they have heard the gospel, and failed to understand it. But it is when the priest has said 'lift up your hearts' and 'let us give thanks' that the people have their most important part to play, when the priest is silent and each person speaks with God. And it is then that they are chattering in the streets or drinking in the taverns. Still, such people have more reverence than those who during the whole mass exchange trivialities in church. Finally, even if between the performer of the sacrifice and those who are present there is no sharing of the signs of the sacrament – which was not the case universally in ancient times, either – there is still a communion of sacred teaching, encouragement to religion, prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. So that which gives life is shared; that is not shared which profits nothing without all the rest.

Some, however, are worried by the adoration in the mass. But if Christ is present completely in the Eucharist, why is he not to be adored? All the

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395 A classic example is Cyprian *Epistles* 63.14 PL 4 397–8. For the use of the word in medieval authors, see Francis Clark *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation* (Westminster MD and London 1967) 404–8.

396 Cf Rom 6:9. Erasmus is here rejecting beliefs which verged on the idea of each mass as a new sacrifice. Though such a view was never approved by the church or by theologians, popular beliefs sometimes came close, and Protestant opponents of the mass were quick to leap upon the error.

397 For most people in late medieval England 'receiving communion was an annual event'; see Duffy 93–4.

same, Christ is present in the sacrament in the form of food and drink so that he may be consumed with absolute purity of mind, and not in order to be exhibited, or carried around at celebrations and public processions, or borne round fields on horseback.[398] That sort of thing is very far removed from ancient practice, and here the people's whims have been indulged more than enough. Then there are those who think themselves extremely pious if whenever the priest displays the body of the Lord they rush up from every corner and gaze on it fixedly from as close as possible.[399] How much more truly religious it would be to remain with the tax-collector[400] far from the chancel rail, bowing one's body to the ground, while with one's mind adoring the crucified Christ. But there is no one so stupid as to adore Christ's human nature rather than the divine, or to worship bread and wine instead of Christ. Since, therefore, no one except the priest himself is certain whether the consecration has really been performed, it follows that no one adores Christ in the sacrament without this unexpressed condition, although there is no place where that which we properly adore in Christ is not present. Furthermore, no sacrament is so lowly that we do not attend its performance with heads bared, as we do at baptism, or the confirmation of children. So what can be the view of those who think it idolatrous to uncover their heads for this sacrament, even if the body and blood of Christ are present there only in a sacred sign?

Again, how many variations we see among the sacramentarians![401] How many times have these very people changed their own ideas, and re-

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398 Erasmus has in mind primarily the elaborate processions which from the fourteenth century onwards were a conspicuous feature of the festival of Corpus Christi; see M. Rubin *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1991) especially 243–71. But Erasmus' words seem to include other forms of eucharistic exposition also. He may further imply that carrying the host 'round fields' was thought to help agricultural fertility: compare the anecdote in Duffy 104 (a beekeeper places a host in his hive to boost honey production; the bees are found to worship it).

399 On the enthusiasm for viewing the host, see Duffy 95–102.

400 Luke 18:13

401 Those who like Zwingli and Oecolampadius believed that the presence of Christ in the sacrament was merely symbolic. Initially Erasmus appears to have had a measure of sympathy for some of these views, but he consistently urged the authority of the consensus of the church as the final arbiter. For a discussion and a collection of passages, see S.M. Foley 'Erasmus and the Sacramentarians' in S.M. Foley and C.H. Miller, eds *Complete Works of St Thomas More* vol 11 (New Haven and London 1985) xxxvii–xlvii. The subject is prompted here by the conclusion of the previous sentence.

jected those of others! Indeed, just recently someone has appeared on the scene who has dreamed up a view of this sacrament so wicked as to remove its whole sacramental nature, since what is performed only by mental processes and with no external sign is not worthy of the name of sacrament.[402] Do those who perpetrate these things suppose that they are occupied with a game of dice, or a disputation on the most serious affairs of all? If they have doubts, as is in fact apparent, how much better it would be to remain in the opinion handed down to us by the Catholic church, which is that it is the actual body and blood of the Lord which is present in the sacrament, and certainly the living body. If we believe that the divine nature was not separated from the Lord's lifeless body in the tomb, how much easier it is to believe that it is not separated from his living body in the sacrament. If we are in agreement on this, the other matters of dispute – the manner of presence of the Lord's body and blood, whether it is there under the substance of bread or both bread and wine, what happens to the body after it has been consumed, and any other such problems – can be settled by a council.[403] But now, when everyone is at liberty to fabricate what he likes on a matter of such import, are we not in a sense converting that one comfort and delight of devout minds into an object of disgust?

The bishops who introduced the vast number of festivals, pandering to the tastes of the multitude, or the popes who did the same for unnecessary causes, will themselves readily agree to their abolition. I mean feasts such as those of the conception and nativity of the Virgin Mother, and the feast of her presentation in the temple.[404] In fact, it might perhaps be a good thing for no solemn feast to be celebrated except those which have a basis in Scripture, always excepting the feast of Sunday. It will be easy to accept

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402 Erasmus may have in mind here Valentin Crautwald and Kaspar Schwenckfeld, whose view was that the body and blood of Christ are nourishment for the soul, as bread and wine are for the body. The real Eucharist was therefore a spiritual partaking of the nature of Christ, and in 1526 they and their associates urged the suspension of the sacrament until some agreement could be reached on its nature. See Williams 204–7.

403 See nn377, 390 above.

404 All these feasts seem to have originated in the Christianity of the East in around the sixth to eighth centuries. The Nativity of the Virgin reached the West in the seventh century, the Conception perhaps in the eleventh, and the Presentation not until the fourteenth. The last two were not universally kept, however. As Erasmus implies, the events commemorated by these feasts have no basis in canonical scripture.

the lesser number of feast days if those which remain are celebrated with greater piety. There is no day which is not sacred which is spent in lawful and honest work for the support of wife and children, or the relief of a neighbour's want. As for the festivals established by the private authority of guilds and confraternities for their own observance, these should be abolished by the magistracy together with the societies themselves, for they are nothing but celebrations of Comus and Bacchus.[405]

Fasting and restrictions on food were ordained by the church solely for reasons of physical and spiritual health. Consequently, the church's decree is in no way binding on those who are endangered by eating fish, or who are aware that fasting injures their bodily health and mental alertness.[406] But what extraordinary perversity it is for those who feel themselves physically and mentally improved by fasting and abstinence to reject this practice so useful to them, simply as it were to spite the church! Thus in this matter no one should judge another. One who eats should not insult those who abstain, and those who abstain should not condemn those who eat, even if there is no obvious reason for their practice. 'They stand or fall before their master.'[407]

I am of the same opinion with regard to other episcopal decrees. If they are truly religious, if they are useful and equitable, they should be preserved for precisely that reason; and if the name 'law' is unattractive, we can still adopt them as helpful counsel. Supposing a slave you have bought from the public auction[408] gives you useful advice, you would listen and take heed, not because the advice is given by a slave, but because it is to the point. Do we then reject the advice of those in positions of public authority, who are in the place of the Fathers and Doctors of the church to us?

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405 Confraternities, voluntary associations established specifically for religious purposes, multiplied greatly during the Middle Ages and were usually named for a saint or holy object. They included trade guilds, which often celebrated the feast days of their patron saints with great magnificence and self-advertisement; for instance, shoemakers celebrated the feast of St Crispin and woolcombers that of St Blaise, observances which in England survived the Reformation and continued into the nineteenth century in some places. Comus, the personification of revelry, is not really a mythological figure like Bacchus, but is described in Philostratus' *Imagines* 1.2.2 (see n386 above).

406 This is what Erasmus believed to be his own case; he describes it in the thinly disguised persona of 'Florentius,' Ep 447.

407 Rom 14:4. The previous sentence paraphrases 14:3 (the issue of eating flesh offered to pagan deities).

408 Proverbial for a person of low status: *Adagia* III i 67: *De lapide emptus* 'bought off the block'

My aim in these suggestions has not been to put forward my remarks as possessing certain truth, or to anticipate the decisions of the church, but rather that, in the interim before a council is summoned, we may ourselves, so far as we can, remove all the causes of dissent; and that we may do nothing by violent or disorderly means, nor inflict on anyone anything for which, if done to us, we should call on heaven and earth and sea; nor force on anyone a new form of religion which he finds abhorrent. Surely it is absolutely fair for those who would not wish to suffer violence for religious reasons to refrain from inflicting it on others, especially when here too those who keep to what has for so long been laid down have the better case. This piece of advice applies to both sides; if a spirit of moderation and compromise[409] soothes the bitterness of our quarrels, then the medicine applied by a council will more easily bring about agreement. It is in just this way that physicians act; before they apply a strong drug, they prepare the body with light and soothing potions, called 'syrups.'[410] If only we could all imitate their example. As it is, I am afraid there may be those whose aim, whether through injudiciousness or in order to secure their own position, is so to exacerbate the situation that the council will be convened in vain.

But what evil spirit has so bewitched the unfortunate Anabaptists?[411] – for I gather that they are rather deceived by error than led on by wickedness in this headlong dash towards their own perdition. Are they not content with the baptism which for fourteen hundred years has contented the Catholic church? In Augustine's time infant baptism was such an old custom

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409 In Greek *συγκατάβασις*; see Introductory Note 130, and n374.

410 *Sirupi*; the word and the practice reached medieval Europe from Arabic medicine.

411 Various groups which rejected infant baptism were known as Anabaptists (rebaptizers), since they held that baptism was valid only when the person baptized was able to seek and understand the baptism. An important influence on this claim was Erasmus' treatment in the *Paraphrases* of the 'great commission' of Matt 28:18–20 and the baptismal passages of Acts, for which see A. Friesen *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge 1998) 44–5, 53. Many of these groups also advocated civil disobedience to what they saw as unjust temporal power, and set up their own communities, sometimes with possessions in common. Among them were the Hutterites in Moravia, and closer to areas Erasmus knew personally the Melchiorites in northwest Germany and the Low Countries. On their exploitation of the radical streak in Erasmus, see Bietenholz *Radical Erasmus*. In 1533 another group led by Jan Mattys was forming in Münster; it would show Anabaptist characteristics in an extreme form. The best general account is Williams. See also CWE 77 635 n1269.

that the originator of the practice was unknown,[412] although it is quite probable that it was introduced by the apostles themselves. It is not indeed stated in Holy Scripture that the apostles baptized infants, but we may fairly conjecture from Scripture that they did. Paul records that he had baptized the three households of Crispus, Gaius, and Stephanas, and at Philippi he baptized a jailer with his whole family in one night.[413] Again, Peter baptized not only the household of Cornelius, but also his relatives and close friends, who had been summoned there to await Peter's arrival (Acts 10).[414] It is likely that these households included a certain number of babies or children. Then take Christ's words: 'Give to Caesar those things which are Caesar's,'[415] and the earnest admonitions of the greatest of the apostles, Peter and Paul, that Christian citizens should obey kings and governors, even if they are idolators.[416] When a servant is baptized, the apostles wish him to serve his master still more faithfully than before;[417] then do the Anabaptists think it so hard to obey the princes who were washed with the same waters of baptism, and who acknowledge the same religion? They are said to demand complete community of possessions from their followers. This was indeed a practice for a while in the time of the apostles, in the very early days of the church, but not even then was it a universal practice among Christians. After the wider diffusion of the gospel such communism could no longer be of use, as it was likely to result in sedition. It is more conducive to concord to leave private property and the right of disposing it with their lawful masters, while charity would guarantee the common use of that property.

And now we hear that a new race of Jews has arisen in Bohemia called Sabbatarians.[418] These keep the sabbath with such superstitious reverence that if something should fall into their eye on that day, they will not re-

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412 Augustine *De baptismo* 4.24 PL 43 174
413 1 Cor 1:14–16; Acts 16:33
414 Acts 10:24ff
415 Matt 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25
416 1 Pet 2:13–17; Rom 13:1–7
417 1 Pet 2:18
418 This passage appears to form the primary evidence for a Christian group at this early date keeping Saturday, rather than Sunday, as the day of rest. The group may have originated among the Bohemian or Moravian Brethren, founded in 1457 from among the followers of Jan Hus. See also CWE 77 635 and n1269 for the possibility that these Sabbatarians are the group referred to in *Hyperaspistes* book 2 'compared with [whose] opinions those of the Anabaptists could seem pious.'

move it;[419] as though Sunday, which the apostles held sacred, were not a sufficient sabbath for them, or as though Christ had not clearly told us how much importance to attach to the sabbath.[420] St Paul threatens with anathema any angel who tried to introduce, even from heaven, a gospel other than that which he himself had preached.[421] But now we observe that many have souls so weak and unsure that if even the least significant paltry fellow introduces a new belief, however absurd, he will find disciples. What explains this extreme vacillation in the hearts of the Germans, who have always been praised above other nations for courage and constancy?[422] What greater happiness could there be than ours, were we to abandon our differences and abide in concord in the house of the Lord? The emperor Charles is devoting all his efforts to this pursuit, as is Ferdinand, king of the Romans, and of Hungary and Bohemia, a prince of outstanding piety. The most Christian king of France, too, will not fail in this matter to live up to his name, and nor will the king of England forget that not long ago he earned the glorious title of defender of the catholic faith.[423] Those who are closely

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419 A conflation of Matt 12:11–12 and Luke 14:5 with Matt 7:2–6 and Luke 6:40–3, implying that this group is more judaizing than the Jews.

420 Mark 2:27–8

421 Gal 1:8

422 The German self-portrait featured the virtues of constancy, simplicity, and honesty (German Latinists prided themselves on being *germani*), and by this date Erasmus tended to think of himself as German, as implied here, although earlier he was less certain. (He may have had in mind here Steuco's attacks on the German nation; see Introductory Note 126–8 above). See James D. Tracy, 'Erasmus Becomes a German' RQ 21 (1968) 284; Ari Wesseling 'Are the Dutch Uncivilized? Erasmus on the Batavians and His National Identity' ERSY 13 (1993) 68–88.

423 Charles V and his brother Ferdinand were genuinely eager that the pope should summon a council in an attempt to sort out religious differences. Between December 1532 and February 1533 Charles and Clement VII had met at Bologna, Charles's main aim being to persuade Clement of the necessity of a council. The enthusiasm of Francis I and Henry VIII was much less reliable, as Erasmus must have been aware. Francis had indeed come out in favour of a council in 1530, but this seems to have been a delaying manoeuvre; he had no wish to see a council effectively brought about by the emperor. Henry had made it clear that his participation in a general council was conditional on a satisfactory outcome of his matrimonial problems. Erasmus is using the well-known panegyrical trope of encouraging a ruler to do something by praising him for actually doing it; the same is true to an extent of his words about Pope Clement, who like his predecessors was unwilling to compromise papal authority by recourse to a council.

acquainted with Pope Clement's disposition assure us that he will agree to the fairest possible terms if only the church's peace can be mended; and the fairmindedness of the learned cardinals will not desert us. With Christ to favour us the whole affair will reach a happy end, if the remaining princes and states also direct their will towards this. Too long have we indulged our quarrels, and now, since we are wearied by this, let us seek concord.

If the Lord's mildness, which ought to stir us to repentance, in fact invites us to licence, we should be afraid lest there may be 'anger when patience has often been injured,'[424] and, as Paul wrote of the Jews, lest 'the anger of God come upon us at last.'[425] It is not prudent to abuse the clemency even of kings. They are not unaware of the forces they may deploy, but because of their mildness they prefer if possible to use gentle remedies rather than cauteries and surgery for this sickness. We may believe that the emperor is sleeping, but he is fully awake to this matter. He may act slowly (it befits a prince endowed with such great power to avoid haste in affairs of state), but at length he brings to fruition whatever intention he has once formed. King Ferdinand's kind disposition and his philosopher's mind, such as Plato looks for in a ruler,[426] deserve not scorn but all the more respect and reverent obedience. Cyclopean daring[427] and thoughtless haste have never had happy results. How truly that wisest of poets wrote: 'Force without counsel rushes to destruction by its own impetus; but controlled force the gods, too, foster and bring to greatness.'[428] If then we temper our counsels and calm our emotions, and devote ourselves to mending the concord of the church, the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled: 'And my people shall dwell in the beauty of peace, and in the tabernacles of faith, and in abundant resting places.'[429] And with one voice, rejoicing with each other, we shall all together say: 'How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts.'

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424 Publilius Syrus 203, quoted in *Adagia* I V 67: *Funem abrumpere nimium tendendo*; cf n367 above.

425 1 Thess 2:16

426 *Republic* 5.473C–D, 503B, 540D. Cf *Institutio principis christiani* ASD IV-1 144: 264–5 / CWE 27 214, where it is argued that to be a philosopher is effectively to be a Christian.

427 Uncivilized, violent deeds: cf *Adagia* I X 69: *Cyclopica vita*

428 Horace *Odes* 3.4.65–7

429 Isa 32:18

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 14 ON THE PURITY OF THE TABERNACLE OR OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Enarratio psalmi 14 qui est de puritate tabernaculi sive ecclesiae christianae

translated and annotated by

CAROLINNE WHITE

Erasmus' commentary on Psalm 14, *On the Purity of the Tabernacle or of the Christian Church*, was the last of his psalm commentaries, indeed the last of his works, to be written. It was published in January 1536, only six months before he died. He wrote it for his friend Christoph Eschenfelder, a customs officer at Boppard on the Rhine who had long been an enthusiastic admirer of Erasmus even before they met in September 1518 when Erasmus was travelling down the Rhine. Their friendship and correspondence (part of which is lost) continued until Erasmus' death. In a letter dated 12 March 1535 (Ep 3003) Eschenfelder asked Erasmus to write a paraphrase of Psalm 128. Instead, Erasmus offered him his explanation of Psalm 14, as he could not remember which psalm Eschenfelder had asked for and he felt that this psalm, with its possibilities for Christological interpretation and its emphasis on the need for true piety, was most appropriate to a man who was such an excellent advertisement for the gospel in his family life and even in his secular profession. In his dedicatory letter Erasmus plays on his friend's name – 'Christoph' (bearer of Christ) – to emphasize that Eschenfelder is an example of Christian devotion who is perhaps unusual among his colleagues but who provides proof that Christ does not dwell only in monasteries.[1]

The number of editions and translations of this work testifies to its popularity, apparently second only to the exposition of Psalm 83. The first edition was published by Froben and Episcopius at Basel in 1536, and this was reprinted four times during the same year, twice at Antwerp (by Hillen and Spyridipaeus), at Leipzig (by Faber), and at Paris (by Wechel). Another edition was printed by Froben and Episcopius at Basel in 1537. For Froben's publication of the *Opera omnia* in 1540 a new edition was prepared. The most recent text is that of ASD,[2] edited by Charles Béné and based on the original Basel edition of 1536. During the twenty years after Erasmus' death the work was translated into Dutch, German, English, and Czech,

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1 Erasmus did not believe that monks had a monopoly on holiness. In the *Enchiridion* Erasmus had written 'monachatus non est pietas' (CWE 66 127); cf the study of this phrase by Erika Rummel, 'Monachatus Non Est Pietas' in Pabel *Erasmus' Vision* 41–55. In Ep 2771, his dedicatory letter to *In omnes psalmos explanatio* by the Carolingian monk Haymo, Erasmus states that a secular person can be equal to a monk by remaining pure, even in the courts of princes and in the midst of worldly affairs.

2 The ASD text is found in vol V-2 287–316 (Amsterdam 1985). For a recent discussion of the significance of Erasmus' commentary on this psalm, see Charles Béné 'Le *De puritate tabernaculi*: Testament spirituel d'Érasme?' in *Actes du Colloque international Érasme (Tours 1986)* (Geneva 1990) 199–212.

and in the early seventeenth century three more Dutch translations appeared. However, it would seem that it has not been translated into English since 1537 when an anonymous translation was printed by John Wayland in London.[3]

Among the patristic commentaries on Psalm 14 Erasmus was of course familiar with those of Augustine, Jerome, and Arnobius the younger, for he had edited their works, and probably also with that of Cassiodorus. Both Augustine and Jerome point out that the first verse of the psalm draws a distinction between man's temporary sojourn in this world and everlasting habitation in heaven, though Augustine also notes that 'tabernacle' indicates a soldier's tent, for we are all soldiers in this life, fighting our enemy the devil. Otherwise Augustine does little more than provide a brief paraphrase or comment on each verse, without developing any overall theme or point of view. Jerome's commentary does make some definite points, such as that justice (*iustitia*) is the mother of all virtues, being the only one which finds its fulfilment primarily in benefiting others. (Erasmus may be echoing this when he says that in the Scriptures justice is often spoken of as referring to all good works.) But even Jerome's commentary suddenly tails off and is surprisingly brief. The commentaries of Arnobius and Cassiodorus bear some resemblances to each other, though Cassiodorus' is more a grammatical and rhetorical analysis; they both see the list of ten virtues given in the psalm as corresponding to the ten commandments and both emphasize that Christ alone was able to fulfil these directions for virtue, illustrating this with examples from the life of Christ. We in turn must imitate Christ as far as possible so that we may be worthy to live with God on the holy mountain in the life to come.

Erasmus' commentary, though based on traditional methods of biblical exegesis, is very different – most obviously in its much greater length. He does discuss and largely accepts the patristic interpretation whereby Christ is regarded as the only one able to fulfil perfectly the definitions of virtue listed in this psalm. However, he expresses some misgiving about the appropriateness of these rather obvious definitions to the perfection of Christ and questions why only these virtues are specified when Christ was free from all sins. Erasmus also sees the structure of the psalm in terms of one verse of question by the prophet, followed by four verses of answer by the Holy Spirit. Finally, Erasmus' words following the reference to Psalm 14:5,

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3 See E.J. Devereux *Renaissance English Translations of Erasmus* (Toronto 1983); Devereux states that Wayland's translation was produced to advance the Reformation in England (102).

'"He who does," he says, "not he who says,"' echo Cassiodorus' words, 'Since he said "does," not "sings,"' emphasizing that actions rather than mere words are necessary for true virtue.

But if Erasmus is not wholly dependent on any one of the Fathers for his interpretation of the psalm, there is evidence that Augustine in particular influenced his discussion on various topics which he treats in the course of his exposition. Erasmus may well have in mind Augustine's thoughts on infant sin, as expressed for example in book 1 of the *Confessions*, as well as his discussion of lies and deceit in the work *De Mendacio*.

Erasmus launches straight into his discussion without any introduction, taking as his starting point the first verse of Psalm 13 (a psalm which he considers to be in particular harmony with Psalm 14): 'The fool has said in his heart "there is no God."' This leads him to the assertion that Christ alone truly fears God. He does however admit that with Christ he includes 'all who are made one with him through faith and love.' In the light of Psalm 13:1 the prophet expresses in Psalm 14:1 his anxiety over the fact that there are so few people whose faith is not merely on their lips but also in their hearts and that therefore so few will attain salvation, for no one is saved unless he is part of the body of Christ which is the church. According to a Christian interpretation of Psalm 14:1 the tabernacle and the holy mountain refer to the church, but Erasmus only hints at such an interpretation here, preferring to set forth the literal meaning first. According to this the tabernacle represents the temple at Jerusalem which was so important to the faith and rituals of the Jews: in fact Erasmus criticizes the Jews for their excessive reverence for the temple and for outward rites and regulations. Later in the commentary similar criticism will be levelled against those Christians who are concerned only with the forms of Christian worship rather than with the essentials of sincere faith and love.

Having briefly explained how the literal meaning, in his opinion, applies particularly to the Levites and priests who performed the Jewish rites in the temple, Erasmus goes on to develop the mystical meaning, whereby the details of the psalm apply to Christ and his church as the true fulfilment of the Jewish message. But who is pure enough to dwell in the church? Christ alone, who is the new priest, for by means of the incarnation God has rejected the old order and the necessity of adherence to the Law, introducing a new spiritual means of salvation. Erasmus does however see two possible objections to such an interpretation of this psalm. If the virtues listed here apply to Christ, why are they such obvious, mediocre virtues, and why are these particular virtues listed? Erasmus tackles the first problem by saying that the virtues are expressed in reverse order (so that a recommendation of excellence precedes the prohibition of vice – a common

device in the Bible) and through understatement, indicating to the attentive reader what lies beneath the surface of this psalm; when applied to Christ the virtues need to be understood as indicating far higher standards. As to the second problem, these virtues symbolize the different roles of Christ, who came to be our king, priest, prophet, judge, and teacher, all of which professions are combined in Christ alone; the prophet lists the most common faults in each of these professions.

Erasmus next considers the possibility of interpreting this psalm with reference to the heavenly life. He notes briefly that such an anagogical interpretation is legitimate, again stressing that access to the heavenly tabernacle is gained by a mind purified by faith in Christ and love of Christ and neighbour rather than by means of religious observances.

Erasmus passes on quickly to the fourth of the traditional senses of Scripture, the moral or tropological sense, which he considers more useful, if less exalted. Psalm 14 can thus be applied to all Christians, not only to Christ or to priests. Every Christian must be aware that 'those who seek true rest must not depart from the holy mountain of God on which the true church is built'; he must strive to free himself from sin and, more positively, fill his life with good works. In cataloguing the vices against which Christians must struggle Erasmus condemns particularly deceit, malicious criticism, and perjury, which he regards as distressingly prevalent in his own day. In his final pages Erasmus picks up the image of the temple from the beginning of his commentary and returns to his criticism of all outward forms of worship which are not combined with genuine piety. This he regards as the chief message of Psalm 14, as the subtitle he gave his commentary indicates. He draws parallels between the psalm and the outspoken attacks on such misguided attitudes to worship by Isaiah and Jeremiah whom he quotes at length, for all these Old Testament texts are as relevant to Christians of the present as to Jews of the past, despite obvious differences in forms of worship. Under the new dispensation each Christian is a spiritual temple in which pure and holy offerings must be made, so that like Christ he may become a king and a priest. In conclusion Erasmus exhorts the reader not to abandon outward forms of worship but to ensure that they are inspired by 'a mind made pure through faith and integrity and prepared by love to treat everyone well,' and to make offerings not of material goods but of our virtues and of praise of God.

In this exposition of the psalm Erasmus makes frequent and extensive allusion to the Old Testament in particular, both to illustrate the minutiae of the Law as set out in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and to use the prophets' criticisms of excessive adherence to outward ritual in support of his own criticism of contemporary trends and attitudes. Such criticism of

Judaizing attitudes within Christianity is common in Erasmus' writings, for he was keen to return to a simplicity and spirituality of worship which he connected with the early church. In this desire he was broadly in agreement with Luther, as also in his allusion to the idea that each Christian becomes a priest through baptism, though in general he came to feel that Luther went too far in his criticism of the status quo in the church; this feeling is evident when he sets himself slightly apart from those who, like Luther, emphasized the importance of faith while neglecting those scriptural passages which recommend good works.

This translation is based primarily on the text of LB, since the text of ASD, based largely on the original edition of 1536 but attempting to emend any errors by reference to later editions, itself contains certain errors and omissions. However, ASD readings that improve on those of LB have been adopted for this translation, as for example *lingua* for *longua* and *molesta* for *molestia*.[4] The most significant textual divergences are indicated in the notes.

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4 *lingua* for *longua*: ASD V-2 305; *molesta* for *molestia*: ASD V-2 311

PSALM 14

1 Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo, aut quis requiescet [conquiescet] in monte sancto tuo?

2 Qui ingreditur sine macula, et operatur iustitiam.

3 Qui loquitur [loquutus est] veritatem in corde suo, nec [qui non] egit dolum in lingua sua, nec fecit [faciet] proximo suo malum, et opprobrium non accepit [accipiet] adversus proximos suos.

4 Ad nihilum deductus est in conspectu eius malignus, sed eos habet in pretio qui timent Dominum. Qui iurat proximo suo et non decipit,

5 Qui pecuniam suam non dedit [dederit] ad usuram, et munera super innocentes non accepit.

6 Qui facit haec, non commovebitur in aeternum.

1 Lord, who will reside in your tabernacle and who will rest on your holy mountain?

2 He who walks without sin and does what is right.

3 He who speaks [has spoken] the truth in his heart, who does not slander with his tongue or harm his neighbour, and who has not lightly accepted criticism of his neighbour.

4 He who regards the wicked man as worthless but glorifies those who fear God. He who swears an oath to his neighbour and does not cheat him,

5 Who does not put his money out to usury and does not accept bribes at the expense of the innocent.

6 He who does these things will not be moved.

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 14, ON THE PURITY
OF THE TABERNACLE OR OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
BY DESIDERIUS ERASMUS OF ROTTERDAM,
TO CHRISTOPH ESCHENFELDER,
CUSTOMS OFFICER AT BOPPARD[1]

Christ called Matthew from the customs office to the service of the gospel. You, dear Christoph, have brought Christ and the gospel into the customs house itself; for while you are dealing with the business of your earthly ruler, you always have among the documents of your worldly office some of those little books which draw your mind up towards the heavenly philosophy. You wish to do justice to your name, in other words, to make your actions live up to your name so that you are no longer a *chrysophorus* ['bearer of gold'], but a *Christophorus* ['bearer of Christ']. You certainly have little in common with those who think that Christ is to be found only in monasteries, for he is more present to all than the sun itself, since he brings light to the whole world. There is a place for Christ also at the courts of princes and in army camps and in naval ships, as long as there is a godly spirit there. You love me in Christ not just more than I deserve but even almost more than you should; yet for one of your loving nature it is not enough if I return your love in equal measure: you wish to have a permanent pledge of our friendship to allow you to imagine that Erasmus is with you and to alleviate your longing for him in his absence. You make it clear that your wish can be fulfilled if I send you one of the psalms together with a commentary. I do not want to make excuses, first because you are such a dear friend and secondly because your request is a pious one and not difficult to carry out. I hope you will consider this gift to be not just a piece of paper from Erasmus' meagre resources but a precious jewel sent from the world of the Holy Spirit, a jewel not to be worn on the finger but stored up in your heart. I cannot remember whether you specified a particular psalm – your letter is buried beneath a pile of papers – so I have chosen the first one that came to hand. Farewell.

Basel, 27 January 1536

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1 The dedicatory letter is Ep 3086; for Eschenfelder, see CEBR I 443.

AN EXPOSITION OF PSALM 14 ON THE PURITY OF THE TABERNACLE OR OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

'Lord, who will reside in your tabernacle?' Since there is but one path to salvation and eternal life, namely to know God and to obey his commandments, in the preceding psalm [13] the prophet lamented the more than blind folly of men. For among them so very few might be found who would welcome the mercy of the Creator and Saviour which is available and offered to all. Most people had been corrupted by their personal desires and so completely misled into a distorted perception that they said in their hearts 'there is no God.'[1] This blasphemous belief about God was the source from which flowed a torrent of offences against their neighbour. For the man who does not love God is incapable of loving his neighbour sincerely – in fact nobody truly loves his neighbour unless he loves him for the sake of God: faith is as it were the root from which the works of love grow. Accordingly, anyone who says inwardly 'there is no God,' because his heart, which is the source of both speech and action, is extremely corrupt, breathes out on his neighbour nothing but the stench of tombs,[2] nothing but deceit and the venom of vipers which is said in another psalm to be deadly.[3] This is the source of foul abuse and bitter criticism, and these lead ultimately to a desire to shed blood which is the final goal of hatred, as St John indicates when he says 'Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer.'[4] For although a person who hates does not always kill, nevertheless as long as he remains a prey to anger and is keen to harm his neighbour he is moving rapidly towards murder and to that extent he is a murderer.

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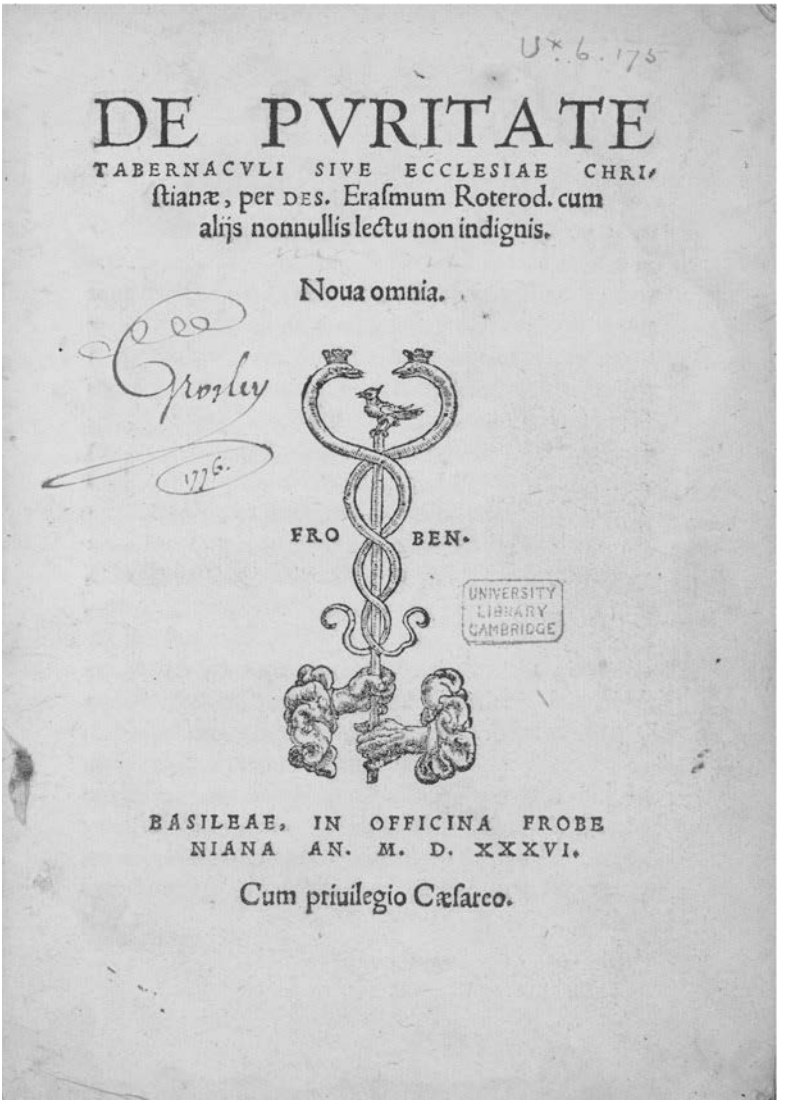
1 Pss 13/14:1, 52/53:1
2 Cf Matt 23:27.
3 The venom of vipers is mentioned in the Vulgate text of Psalm 13:3, but Erasmus is probably recalling Deut 32:33.
4 1 John 3:15



Title-page of the first edition of *De puritate tabernaculi*
(Basel: Froben and Episcopius 1536)
Cambridge University Library, University of Cambridge. U*.6.175(E)

John bears witness[5] to the fact that good men experience no greater joy than when they see as many people as possible attaining a knowledge of the truth and advancing along the path of evangelical truth; similarly nothing causes them more sorrow than when they observe such blind ignorance in so many, such disregard for the goodness of God, such a lack of neighbourly charity, while on the other hand so few people show any evidence of true faith and true love. For it is not only the Epicureans who say in their hearts 'there is no God';[6] you might find innumerable people (and it is impossible to say this without a deep sigh) who say in their heart 'there is no God.' If only such blasphemous words were not uttered by Christians in the presence of Christians!

However, let us not dwell on extreme cases of this kind but speak of more familiar examples instead. There are people who have no interest in spiritual matters and are completely absorbed by their desire for earthly benefits – wealth, fame, luxuries, and other pleasures: they pursue these things by fair means or foul, resorting to perjury, looting, robbery, or criminal acts of deceit. If they are successful in attaining what they desire, they think themselves fortunate; but if they lose them, they hurl reproaches at both God and the saints.[7] Do not such people, too, seem to be saying inwardly 'there is no God'? With their lips they openly acknowledge God but by their deeds they deny him. So many people like this exist, and in contrast there are so few who genuinely fear God that the prophet pictures God looking down from heaven to see whether there is anyone at all who recognizes his existence or who seeks him.[8] And although he surveys the whole human race from on high, he finds only one, that is, Jesus Christ. With Christ, however, are included all who are made one with him through faith and love. For no one since the world began has been pleasing to God unless he has put his faith in God's mercy, which is freely given and offered to all men through Christ. For although some gained salvation under the law of nature[9] and many did so under the law of Moses, while a very great number have been saved under the law of the gospel, nevertheless salvation is not strictly owing to any law

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5 3 John 4
6 See eg Lucretius *De rerum natura* 1.158–9, 2.177–81.
7 For anger against the Virgin Mary and saints who do not grant what people pray for, see the colloquy *Peregrinatio religionis ergo* CWE 40 625.
8 Ps 13/14:2
9 Cf Rom 2:14–15. For Erasmus' optimistic sense of human nature, see the colloquy *Convivium religiosum* CWE 39 192; cf *De concordia* 202 and n378 above.

but only to God's mercy through Christ. The church of the just which is the body of Christ has existed from the very beginning of the world and so has the Christian message, that is, the remission of sins which was divinely revealed and has as its source the mercy of God freely given for Christ's sake; there has existed also the grace which has purified men's hearts by faith, although the incarnate Christ and the preaching of the apostles caused it to spread further and to shine forth more brightly.[10] Indeed, what St Paul so often emphasized held true even then, namely that no one attains perfect righteousness through the Law or the works of the Law except by trusting in Christ,[11] although not all men possessed that faith by which we may seize the grace offered to us. In the same way, even today, despite the fact that there are a great number of people who confess their faith with their lips,[12] there are very few whose heart contains true faith. There are few, I maintain, in comparison with those who are either hostile to the Christian message or who accept it in a pharisaical spirit. Isaiah realized how few they were and lamented the fact, and Paul is quoting him when he says: 'Lord, who has believed our words?'[13] And Christ's words to his disciples while he still walked this earth, 'Fear not, little flock, for the kingdom of heaven is yours,'[14] are still relevant even today to those who truly place all their trust in Christ, although even among these few everything is weak, unfinished, and imperfect, if not unclean.

The prophet, then, lamented the great scarcity of blameless men and the great number of wicked and unjust people. He also observed that there is no hope of salvation except in God's tent and on the sacred mountain which is the church, where no one is granted rest unless he becomes by faith a part of the body of that Christ who exclaims in the Gospel: 'Come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will refresh you.'[15] Reflecting on men's impurity – for outstanding purity is required if you are to become one with Christ and live with him in the house of God – the prophet calls to the Father in his fear and anxiety: 'Lord, who will reside in your tabernacle and who will rest on your holy mountain?' According

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10 Cf *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 51 and n223.
11 Rom 3:20, 22, 28; Titus 3:5
12 Rom 10:9–10
13 Rom 10:16, referring to Isa 53:1
14 Luke 12:32
15 Matt 11:28; Erasmus here echoes the formula of Cyprian, 'for there is no salvation outside the church,' on which see *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 16 and n25.

to the most basic meaning,[16] the tabernacle which Moses had constructed at God's command[17] stood in Jerusalem on Mount Sion until the time when Solomon, once again in accordance with an oracle from God, built on the same spot that most splendid, impressive and celebrated temple[18] which was also venerated by the pagan nations. In the same place stood the palace of David. And just as the Jews took pride in Abraham and David, whose descendants they boasted that they were, so they prided themselves on the city of Jerusalem. We gather from the gospels that they used to swear by it as by a holy object;[19] in fact, they put too much confidence in the temple and the altar, which is why the prophet reproached them thus: 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord' and so on.[20] They believed that God lived there and they thought that this was the place where they had to worship him; this was where they had to placate him by means of sacrifices; this, they believed, was where they had to seek religious guidance and where the mercy seat stood from which God made his prophetic utterances. There lay the tablets written with the finger of God, there lay Aaron's rod, and there stood the ark of the covenant, the sacred table, the jar of manna, and the cherubim.[21] There was the Holy of Holies which only the high priest was allowed to enter, and even he only once a year.[22] This was the cause of the Jewish people's arrogance and pride and the reason why they scorned all other nations. Indeed, so great was their pride and their reverence for the temple that they brought a most shocking charge of blasphemy against Christ because he had said: 'Destroy this temple and I will restore it in three days.'[23] (The hidden meaning of his words was that he must be put to death by the Jews and within three days he would come back to life.)

And so, in my opinion at any rate, the literal meaning of this psalm applies particularly to the Levites and the priests whose duty it was to re-

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16 Ie the literal or historical sense
17 Exod 25–7
18 3 Kings/1 Kings 5–8
19 Matt 23:21
20 Jer 7:4
21 For the tablets written with the finger of God, see 2 Chron 5:10, Heb 9:4; for Aaron's rod, see Num 17:10, Heb 9:4; for the ark of the covenant, see Num 7:89, Heb 9:4, Rev 11:19; for the sacred table, see 2 Chron 13:11, Heb 9:2; for the jar of manna, see Exod 16:32–4, Heb 9:4; for the cherubim, see Num 7:89, and 3 Kings/1 Kings 8:6–7.
22 3 Kings/1 Kings 8:6, Heb 8:6; Heb 9:7
23 John 2:19

side in the tabernacle for which they were responsible and to take their rest in the temple. For it was of these men that the utmost purity was demanded, as well as exceptional holiness, but the ordinary Jews believed that this consisted in the performance of outward rites. This was why they performed that scrupulous consecration of their head, hands and garments and those frequent ritual washings. The priests were not permitted to assist at a funeral or to touch a corpse;[24] they were not allowed to eat unconsecrated bread or to visit women and children or to step outside the temple,[25] at least not on those days when they were engaged in sacred rites, in case they should be infected by some impurity from any source whatsoever.

However, all these things were merely shadows or types of far greater things. For Christ is our true David: to him has been promised a kingdom extending to the farthest corners of the earth which will endure as long as the sun and moon,[26] and to him has been granted all power in heaven and on earth.[27] He is Christ, anointed[28] not with the oil of priests but with heavenly grace before all the sons of men. His royal palace is the church, which the Lord himself sometimes refers to as the kingdom of heaven;[29] his power is the freedom of the spirit; his tabernacle the association of believers of all nations; his Jerusalem is that mystical city which St John beheld, according to Revelations 21,[30] built of living stones with Christ himself as the cornerstone.[31] The holy mountain corresponds to the sublime heights of Christian teaching and to the inviolable truth on which the temple structure rests, and it is also mentioned in another psalm: 'He who trusts in the Lord is like Mount Sion; he who lives in Jerusalem will never be moved.'[32] The prophet, therefore, is contemplating with spiritual eyes the wonderful majesty and sanctity of the church to which those types refer, for the glory of the church has eclipsed all those things which the Jews considered so glorious and has deprived them of honour according to the interpretation of Paul.[33]

And when the prophet perceives that there is no mortal who can live in purity in the house of God and offer a sacrifice pleasing to God, he

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24 Lev 21:11; Num 19:11–13
25 Lev 21:12
26 Pss 2:8, 71/72:5, 88:37–8/89:36–7
27 Matt 28:18
28 The literal meaning of the Greek name for Christ is 'anointed.'
29 See Matt 11:12, 13:31, 33.
30 Rev 21:10–21
31 Eph 2:20; Ps 117/118:22
32 Ps 124/125:1
33 2 Cor 3:7–11

turns to the heavenly Father and cries out: 'Lord, who will reside in your tabernacle and who will rest on your holy mountain?' Knowledge of the true God is restricted to a small corner of the world, while other nations worship pieces of wood or stones instead of God and sacrifice to demons, at whose whim they are dragged by the nose, like oxen, into committing all kinds of offences. Indeed, even among people belonging to that race which you chose for your own there is no one who worships you properly: and yet this was the race which you awakened to a knowledge of your greatness by means of so many prophetic signs, which you roused to a love of you by means of so many acts of kindness, and which you surrounded with so many precepts and commandments to protect them, instructing them by means of a great many prophets. They have one God on their lips but in their hearts they have many gods, for one person is subject to anger, envy, or a desire for revenge, another to greed, while another is a slave to ambition and pride. Moreover, those who believe that they are exceptionally virtuous because of their adherence to the Law do not obey the most important commandment of the Law. For who loves you with all his heart, with all his mind, and with all his strength and his neighbour as himself?[34] Consequently, although your Law is in itself good, it works to their detriment and does not make you more favourably inclined to them, but angers you instead; it does not acquit the accused but rather convicts them. Many people worship you according to rules laid down by men, or at least by means of outward ceremonies: they wander around in your temple, perform sacrifices, burn incense, and make votive offerings. But you, whom the whole world cannot contain, are by no means confined to buildings constructed by human hands;[35] you pay no attention to those worshippers who worship you within walls built by craftsmen. Since you are spirit and the highest truth, you seek true worshippers to worship you in spirit and in truth.[36] Your soul hates our sabbaths and our new-moon celebrations; it is not sacrifices you demand in exchange for our sins.[37] You have no need of our possessions – in fact our sacrifices to you are made from what is yours – and you detest the offerings made by people whose hands are covered in blood.[38] The blood of goats or bullocks cannot cleanse anyone of their sins. You are perfect and you

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34 The twofold commandment is given at Lev 19:18; Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37, 39; Mark 12:33; Luke 10:27.
35 Acts 7:48, 17:24
36 John 4:24
37 Isa 1:13–14; cf Heb 10:11.
38 Isa 1:15

demand what is perfect, but the Law makes nothing perfect.[39] Now supposing that a human priest, by offering animals or birds or fine flour sprinkled with oil, could make atonement for the sins of the synagogue or the ruler or some ordinary person, is there any priest who is so untainted by any sin that he would not need some sacrifice to purify him? Which priest could make an offering so efficacious that it might expiate the sins of the whole human race? For all human nature is completely corrupted from its very source by the sin of man's first parents. I am aware that you despise the things of old and demand that everything be new: you renovate the temple, you change the Law, and you institute new rites and a new priesthood. But who is the priest so free from blemish, so acceptable, that he can appease you in your anger with all men? Who will dwell in this new tabernacle of yours which has come from heaven? Who will reside on your holy mountain which no one who is defiled may approach? Who will offer a sacrifice so effective that it will truly purify the hearts of men?'

The Lord responds to the prophet's anxiety by saying: I do not deny anything you have said; what you declare is true. I am setting up a new tabernacle and I do demand a new victim for I have long been weary of the old ones. I shall present a new priest, not an earthly one from the earth but a heavenly one from heaven,[40] so that he might renew every creature; not that he might make one sacrifice after another but that by his one sacrifice he might remain a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek.[41] I shall describe him to you: he will walk on earth among men but he alone will be without any blemish. He will mix with sinners but so that he might forgive them. He will administer perfect justice in every respect so that he alone may say: 'Which of you will accuse me of sin?'[42] That charlatan, the prince of this world, will come to him but find no sin in him.[43] He will speak the truth in his heart for he will say nothing except what I tell him to say. He will not flatter the wicked nor will he deceive the good with empty promises; he will promise remission of sins to those who trust in him and he will keep his promise; he will promise resurrection and eternal life and his promise will be fulfilled. Moreover, far from harming his neighbour, he will actually lay down his life even for his enemies and intercede with

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39 Matt 5:47; Heb 7:48
40 1 Cor 15:47–9
41 Ps 109/110:4; Heb 5:6, 7:17
42 John 8:46
43 Cf John 14:30.

me for those at whose hands he is to die. For he will come not to destroy but to save,[44] not to judge but to reconcile.

Nor will he lightly accept criticism of his neighbour, for this is he who, as he dies, will cry out on behalf of his most cruel murderers: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'[45] And he will overthrow the devil who denounces his brothers and render him speechless by destroying that bond of obligation with which the devil threatened to indict the entire human race.[46] And although the devil, with that malice of his which makes him begrudge salvation to man, will arm all his troops against my priest, devising every kind of stratagem and using every kind of contrivance in his attack, he will however achieve only his own destruction and annihilation. Furthermore, the cruelty of the wicked will only cause the glory and triumph of my priest to shine more brightly. Their intense efforts to destroy him will be unsuccessful despite their desire to expunge his memory completely from the minds of men, and in fact they will gain nothing for themselves but eternal ignominy and ruin.

For this priest of mine, whom I shall set in authority over the new temple and the new kingdom, will by his death subdue death's instigator and through the disgrace of the cross will hold a glorious triumph over the spiritual enemy. He will allow to share in this glory all those who fear to offend the Father and who obey my beloved Son, with whom alone I shall be so pleased[47] that there is nothing at all to give me offence. Moreover, he will have such great favour and authority with me that I shall deny him nothing. True glory, however, derives from having conquered the world, subdued the flesh, and overcome Satan.[48] But just as my Son's glory will to some extent be hidden from men while he bears the form of a servant, of a poor and humble sinner, and while he is reviled, accused, and condemned and led to the cross, so the glory of those who fear God will either be entirely hidden or at least be obscured from men because of the weakness of the flesh and manifold misfortunes. Nevertheless, after he has been condemned and crucified between the thieves, he will come again in majesty

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44 Luke 9:56
45 Luke 23:34
46 Col 2:14
47 Matt 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; 2 Pet 1:17
48 The popular Christian phrase, 'the world, the flesh, and the devil,' echoes 1 John 2:16; it was used in the litany, the baptism rite, monastic vows, and the catechism. According to Abelard, 'there are three things that tempt us, the flesh, the world, the devil' PL 178 617A. Cf Erasmus *Enchiridion* CWE 66 58 and *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-5 80:543–5.

with countless thousands of angels,[49] together with all good men who have been restored to life; and when those who share his sufferings also share in his glory, then the wicked will witness the one whom they tortured[50] and those whom they abused and scorned eclipsing the sun's brightness with their own. They will regret their folly, but too late.

It seemed a good idea to touch on these points because I see that even some of the ancient writers applied the whole of this psalm to the person of Christ.[51] What has been said so far accords well, I think, with this interpretation, but what follows appears less appropriate: 'He who swears an oath to his neighbour and does not cheat him,' 'who does not lend money to usury and does not accept bribes at the expense of the innocent.' For it is no great achievement to refrain from doing what is a serious crime, as, for example, committing perjury, increasing one's wealth by means of usury, or being bribed by gifts to condemn an innocent man or accuse him with false testimony. Even among the pagans people who behaved in this way were considered criminal and such behaviour was punishable by law. Those who did not do such things were not rewarded with any of the benefits with which the state usually honours the deserving. In Christ, however, nothing suffices except what is of the highest perfection, transcending all the commandments of the law.

Another problem presents itself: in describing Christ, why does he mention these offences rather than those which the Jewish law equally condemns? For example, why does he not say, 'he who does not steal, who does not kill, who does not commit adultery'?[52] We are faced with difficulties even if we apply the present passage not to Christ's person but to the ministers of the church or to any one member of the church. There may well be need here of a weightier intellect, better versed in sacred letters, to explain these problems. Nevertheless, I shall put forward my views, such as they are, but only on condition that no one be prevented from making a contribution if he has something better to put forward.

Scripture directs us towards virtue in various ways. Sometimes it preserves the natural order, first recalling a man from his faults and then exhorting him to virtuous deeds.[53] For it is natural first to unlearn bad habits

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49 Matt 25:31

50 Zech 12:10; John 19:37

51 Arnobius the younger (PL 53 341) and Cassiodorus (PL 70 108–11), for instance, interpret this psalm as a description of Christ's moral perfection.

52 Exod 20:13–15

53 See Chomarat I 688–9 on the scriptural use of the reversed order in connection

and then to advance towards the good, just as nature itself is first imperfect and, according to the Apostle, physical, and then perfect and spiritual.[54] The Spirit preserves this order when it says: 'Refrain from evil and do good. Seek peace and pursue it.'[55] Similarly Isaiah says: 'Take the evil of your thoughts away from my eyes. Cease to behave badly and learn to do good.'[56] Immediately afterwards he adds a commandment to love: 'Help the needy, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow.' So also in the gospel parable the house is first cleaned out and only then must it be decorated.[57] Inner cleanliness, that is innocence, is granted as a result of faith and baptism, while the external ornaments are a result of good works. This is the meaning of those words of St Paul: 'Let us reject the works of darkness and let us put on the armour of light,'[58] and also of those in Colossians, chapter 3: 'Now therefore, lay aside all these things, anger,'[59] and so on. Occasionally this order is reversed, in cases where the recommendation of excellence precedes the prohibition of those things which conflict with perfection. An example of this is the exhortation given by Paul: 'Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and immoral behaviour, not in quarrels and jealousy.'[60] It is not unusual for these things to be combined, as in the words of the Lord: 'Speak well of those who persecute you, speak well and do not curse them.'[61] Sometimes the commandment refers only to good things: for example, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart,' etc, 'and your neighbour as yourself.'[62] The prohibition of wrongdoing is more appropriate to stubborn and rebellious people, while exhortations to good behaviour are suitable for those who are obedient and who of their own accord are fired with a desire for virtue.

It is by such means that Scripture works for the salvation of all so that the perfect might have a way of advancing towards a more perfect

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with Erasmus' discussion of the problems of applying this psalm to the person of Christ.

54 1 Cor 15:44, 46

55 Pss 33:15/34:14, 36/37:27

56 Isa 1:16–17

57 Matt 12:44

58 Rom 13:12

59 Col 3:8

60 Rom 13:13

61 Erasmus attributes these words to Christ but in Scripture it is St Paul who is their author, at Rom 12:14. Erasmus may have had in mind Christ's words at Matt 5:44 and Luke 6:27.

62 Matt 22:37, 39; Mark 12:33; Luke 10:27; cf n34 above.

state, while the weak and forgetful might be restrained and admonished. The ignorance and crassness of the human mind is amazing; that is why the ten commandments, which were given to a stupid and rebellious people, include three commandments demanding good deeds while all the others are concerned to prohibit crimes: 'thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery,' etc.[63] But in cases where both types are combined, it might appear that one of them is superfluous were it not for the fact that our weakness and forgetfulness require repeated reminders of this kind. Otherwise, why did the Lord, when he said, 'bless those who persecute you,' need to add, 'bless and do not curse them,' unless it was in order to fix this commandment more firmly in the hearts of his disciples? Both aspects, then, should be understood in either formulation; for example, when Scripture commands that God should be loved above all else and our neighbour as ourselves, it expressly forbids everything that conflicts with love of God and neighbour. Again, when the law says, 'thou shalt not kill,' it implicitly recommends all the works of charity by which we can assist our neighbour. Similarly, when it says, 'thou shalt not commit adultery,' it enjoins all the things which preserve chastity, namely sobriety, hard work, fasting, and prayer. However, less sophisticated people do not grasp the hidden meanings, and therefore the prophets, Christ, and the apostles have clarified for us what was expressed in a brief and rather obscure manner.

In this psalm, then, the order is reversed. First, the sum of perfect virtue is held up as a model and then, for the sake of the less sophisticated, a detailed account is given of those things which conflict with it. For when the prophet says 'he who walks without sin and does what is right,' he is including that goodness which is complete and perfect; for he who walks without sin admits no fault and he who does what is right leaves no obligation unfulfilled. According to this interpretation it is no feeble commendation when it is said that Christ did not slander with his tongue.[64] For we realize that he is the only person in whose every word (that is, in all the books of the scriptural canon) the eternal and irrefutable truth stands firm without any hint of error. When it is said that he did not harm his neighbour, we learn that everything in his life and death was designed for the salvation of all men. When it is said that he did not lightly accept criticism of his neighbours, we understand that he interceded with the Father on

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63 Exod 20:13–15
64 1 Pet 2:22; cf Ps 14/15:3.

behalf of impious and criminal people.[65] When we are told that he did not cheat his neighbour by committing perjury, we are reminded that, whatever Christ promised through the prophets (for he spoke through them), he fulfilled with perfect trustworthiness. He promised great things, things that are scarcely credible to human minds: namely, that God would come in the flesh, that he would redeem the human race by his death, that he would come to life again after three days, that he would ascend to heaven and return with glory to judge both the living and the dead,[66] and that he would bring his people back to life and lead them to blessed immortality. He has already granted most of these things and there is no doubt that he will grant the rest with the same good faith. When it is said that he did not lend his money at interest, we must understand that he was completely untainted by all earthly desires, for he freely benefited all men without seeking any profit, power, or glory in return for his kindness: he gave without recompense, healed without recompense, redeemed without recompense, and gave us his whole self and all that was his without demanding anything in return. And yet he himself had nowhere to lay his head in this world,[67] and he declared that his kingdom was not of this world,[68] he who sought not his own glory but that of the Father.[69] Far from accepting bribes at the expense of the innocent, he actually gave himself as the price to be paid for the redemption of sinners, laying down his life in order to win them back and bring them to everlasting life. As these are the most outstanding achievements, so he alone accomplished them most perfectly, and it is for this reason that 'he will never be moved.' For in the words of the Apostle, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.'[70]

So much for the first point which might present a problem to the reader, on the grounds that these statements do not seem quite appropriate to Christ. We must briefly clear up another problem too: why is it only these offences of which the prophet acquits Christ although he was equally free from all other faults? It seems to me that by means of these remarks the prophet has made an appropriate distinction between the person of Christ and all others, but it should be remembered that the single person of Christ

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65 See eg Luke 23:34.
66 2 Tim 4:1
67 Matt 8:20, Luke 9:58
68 John 18:36
69 John 8:50
70 Heb 13:8

contains several roles, those of king, priest, prophet, judge, and teacher. In his role as king he has need of a power that is more than human, indeed greater even that that of the angels, so that he may bind the strong man and then enter his house and plunder his goods.[71] That is why it is written: 'He regards the wicked man as worthless.'

As a priest he requires exceptional purity in order to expiate the sins of all men on his own. Indeed I do not know whether such purity has ever been found to exist in any human being; for we are all born sons of wrath and, as David admits, we are conceived in sin.[72] The Son of God alone entered his mother's womb without carnal union and did not violate her virginity but rather consecrated it. Indeed the quality of his whole life resembled that of his conception and birth. The prophet indicates this when he says, 'And he does what is right.' However, there has never been a priest whose conception and birth were free from all sin or whose life was pure in every way. Aaron, the founder and head of the priesthood, issued from his mother in such a way that he needed to be circumcised, and it was no trivial offence which he committed against God when he pandered to the people's madness in the matter of the golden calf.[73] Eli sinned in his indulgence towards his sons.[74] Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was convicted of disbelief and as a result was punished with the loss of the use of his tongue for a time.[75] But why should I mention these men? It has been proved that no one is free from sin by that very law which prescribes a victim for the priest to sacrifice, appropriate to his offence.[76] I shall omit here the false prophets, for even among the recognized prophets none has ever existed who was completely irreproachable, seeing that even Isaiah had need of a live coal to purify his lips.[77] There was no one to whom everything was revealed nor was the prophetic spirit always present, and if it was present, it did not provide answers to everything. Indeed one of the prophets complains: 'The Lord has hidden this word from me.'[78] The gift of prophecy is granted to each man according to the extent of his faith; in Christ alone did the full and complete measure of divinity reside in bodily form. He was

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71 Matt 12:29; Mark 3:27
72 For the phrase 'sons of wrath,' see Eph 2:3; for 'conceived in sin,' see Ps 50:7/51:5.
73 Exod 32
74 1 Kings/1 Sam 2:22–5
75 Luke 1:20
76 Lev 16:11
77 Isa 6:6–7
78 Elisha in 4 Kings/2 Kings 4:27

not advised in a dream or a vision but brought with him from the Father a perfect knowledge of all things past, present and future. This is what is referred to by the words 'He has spoken the truth in his heart and has not slandered with his tongue.'

In a judge one looks for a complete familiarity with the cases in hand, integrity and a mind which is not open to improper influence. In the Gospel the Lord says of himself: 'The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to his Son,'[79] and in the creed it is stated that he will come to judge both the living and the dead. He alone truly judges who does not judge by appearances but looks deep into men's hearts,[80] who does not recognize men's outward differences[81] but repays each person according to what he has done in his body.[82] And according to the words of the Gospel people who attempt to influence the judge's good will at that Last Judgment by reminding him of their original intimacy and the outward deeds they have performed will hear: 'Amen, I say unto you, I do not know you.'[83]

Approximately the same things are required of a teacher as of a prophet, for the prophet is also a teacher, just as a king is also a judge. A teacher must be wise, reliable, and authoritative, and he is expected to have a way of life which accords with his teachings. In Christ alone did the full perfection of divine wisdom exist; he was a faithful and wise mediator of the heavenly mysteries[84] who from his treasure revealed both new things and old.[85] And as for authority, it has never been said without reservation of anyone, 'listen to him'[86] – except of Christ whose every word was spirit and life.

The prophet, therefore, recalls especially the faults commonly associated with those whose roles, as we have said, are all drawn together in Christ alone. He did so in order that the whole world might understand that one man would come at last who would take on the role of irreproachable king, a priest pure in every respect, a prophet truthful in all things, a teacher who teaches others only what he himself practises, and a judge who is incorruptible: so now there is nothing to be sought in this life apart from Christ.

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79 John 5:22
80 John 7:24; 1 Kings/1 Sam 16:7
81 Eph 6:9; Rom 2:11
82 2 Cor 5:10
83 Matt 7:23, 25:12; Luke 13:25–7
84 Cf 1 Cor 4:1.
85 Matt 13:52
86 Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35

It is unnecessary to mention what everyone knows, namely how much evil some kings have caused mankind because of their power and cruelty, robbing the people by means of harsh taxes, violating just laws and laying down unfair ones, instigating unjust wars, giving ear to informers and flatterers, raging against innocent people, and accepting bribes to appoint unworthy men to the office of magistrate. We shall be silent about infamous princes and priests of this kind who exist in large numbers. What wonderful scriptural testimony distinguished Moses, and yet he was accused of impiety because he did not honour God when his people thirsted:[87] that was why he was not allowed to enter the promised land although he had already been forgiven for killing the Egyptian.[88] And heavy was the blame which lay on Aaron because he heeded the demands of the people for pagan gods.[89] Did not David combine outrage with cruelty, adultery, and murder? And yet it is to him that the celebrated testimony of the divine utterance refers when it is said: 'I have found a man after my own heart.'[90] This same man was called a bloody man[91] and was judged unworthy to build a temple for the Lord. Even as a young man Solomon displayed an exceptional mastery of the Scriptures, but with how many crimes did he then blacken that glorious reputation?[92] I have mentioned two exceptional men but I shall not recall any others, for I do not wish to go on at too great length.

But although our David, the true king of Sion, wields eternal and unshakeable power, nevertheless, according to the prophecy of Zechariah,[93] he has come not against us but for us, not with violence but with justice, not as oppressor but as saviour of the people, not to be feared for his cruelty but with gentleness and peace, seated on a donkey. Now even if other examples were to be given, however esteemed these people may be and honoured by epitaphs recording their virtuous achievements, nevertheless, compared with Christ, they are all sinners. There is no one who was not conceived in sin (I am not making any judgment about the Virgin Mary);[94] no one who

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87 Num 20:2–12; Deut 32:51–2
88 Exod 2:12
89 Exod 32:1–6
90 1 Kings/1 Sam 13:14; Ps 88:21/89:20; Acts 13:22
91 2 Kings/2 Sam 16:7–8
92 3 Kings/1 Kings 3–11
93 Zech 9:9
94 Ps 50:7/51:5. Erasmus is referring here to the belief in the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. For many centuries this belief remained a matter of controversy; many medieval theologians hesitated to state that she had been completely exempt from sin, lest this belief endanger the doctrine of the

was not born a son of wrath,[95] no one who does not carry around with him an evil concupiscence which is deeply ingrained in human nature, so that it is impossible for anyone's life to be completely irreproachable.[96] I shall not pursue this point at greater length: for the moment it is sufficient to indicate that those sins are mentioned which many among the Jews were guilty of in those particular offices which we revere together in Christ alone.

It should be noted that the theme of this psalm is not incompatible with that of the previous one. There the prophet reminded us how utterly corrupt the human race was and how God had consigned all things to sin, that he might have mercy upon all.[97] He also reflected on the fact that in order to placate God's great wrath the law would not suffice – indeed it would rather aggravate it – nor would any of the sacrifices ordained by Moses. Instead a new king with divine powers was needed, who could destroy Satan's tyranny; and a new priest was needed, untainted by any sin, who would offer a sacrifice far more efficacious than the blood of an animal. As he could see no such person in the entire human race, he turns to God and cries out: 'Who will grant the deliverance of Israel from out of Sion?' and hears in reply: 'When the Lord has released his people from captivity, Jacob will rejoice and Israel will be glad.'[98] As we have mentioned, on Mount Sion stood the tabernacle and the royal palace: both of these words refer to the church, which is also called the kingdom of heaven. All who have been chosen to enter it are called, according to St Peter, 'a holy nation' and 'a royal priesthood.'[99] But what was that captivity which prevented the Israelites from rejoicing and being glad? For in fact at that period the Hebrew people were not enslaved to anyone, but the curse of the Law was an

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universality of the Redemption. The issue was still a live one in Erasmus' day, with the Franciscans, following Duns Scotus, defending the belief, while the Dominicans opposed it, though papal support increasingly favoured it. The doctrine was formally promulgated by Pope Pius IX in 1854. Erasmus himself seems to have given a qualified assent to the doctrine; see Leon-E. Halkin 'La Mariologie d'Érasme' repr *Érasme. Sa pensée et son comportement* (London 1988) 39–43.

95 Eph 2:3

96 For a more formal account of Erasmus' views on original sin, see *Hyperaspistes* (1527) where he distinguishes his position from Luther's more extreme one: 'it is better... to take a middle position than either to attribute nothing to our natural proclivity or else to attribute more to it than any pious person can tolerate' (CWE 77 575).

97 Rom 11:32

98 Ps 13/14:7

99 1 Pet 2:9

oppressive captivity, imposing a severe master on a nation which was without the Spirit. For wherever the Spirit is absent, freedom is absent too;[100] where the Law inspires fear of punishment, there can be no true joy of heart.

Since, therefore, there was no hope of salvation from men, the Father sent his only begotten Son who was more powerful than that tyrant the devil to save his people from captivity, freeing us by grace from the curse of the Law;[101] he sent his Son as a mighty priest who would intercede on behalf of the chosen ones and be heeded because of the reverence due to him;[102] then at last Jacob rejoiced and Israel was glad. Jacob and Israel are both names designating the same person, but in accordance with scriptural usage they are here used to refer to the nation itself. Furthermore, both words can be translated 'wrestler.' Jacob means 'supplanter' in Hebrew[103] and Israel means 'soldier of God.' According to the sacred writings Jacob did indeed wrestle with Esau in their mother's womb.[104] He also wrestled again with the angel, and it was as a result of this struggle that he earned the name Israel: 'I will not let go until you bless me,' he said.[105] He supplanted his brother to win his father's blessing,[106] and by struggling with the angel he obtained God's blessing. It should not seem absurd that a man is said to wrestle with God, seeing that we hear the Lord himself saying in the Gospel: 'The kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force.'[107] The Samaritans and the Gentiles were rushing in before their time as if the gates had burst open, seeing that the Lord was first sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.[108]

But what is this violence which takes the kingdom of God by storm? It is faith, a powerful and irresistible force which somehow extorts from God what no merits can obtain. Did not that woman of Canaan appear in some way to have wrestled with the Lord Jesus when she pestered him with her persistent cry although he was unwilling to listen?[109] (I am giving a figurative interpretation.) Similarly, when she was rejected with the insult

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100 2 Cor 3:17
101 Gal 3:13
102 Heb 5:7
103 Jerome *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 781
104 Gen 25:22
105 Gen 32:26
106 Genesis 27
107 Matt 11:12
108 Matt 15:24
109 Matt 15:21–8

about the dog, she begged him for the crumbs like a little puppy. Does she not seem to be joining Jacob in saying: 'I will not let you go until you bless me'? Then when the Lord says to her: 'O woman, great is your faith; let it be to you as you wish,' do not these seem to be the words of a man beaten in a struggle? Do you wish to hear what a powerful and obstinate thing faith is? 'Only believe,' he says, 'for all things are possible for the one who believes.'[110]

However that may be (for I do not wish to digress too far), just as in Psalm 13, on the question of the salvation of the human race, the prophet asked who would at last appear to bring help in such a desperate situation, here he cries: 'Lord, who will reside in your tabernacle and who will rest on your holy mountain?' When he mentions the tabernacle he is asking for a perfect priest; when he mentions the holy mountain he desires a king more powerful than the might of Satan. And this is the reply he hears from the Holy Spirit: 'He who walks without sin and does what is right.' This statement refers to the person of Christ, who alone was absolutely free from all faults: his teaching has nothing insignificant or trivial about it, for as it comes from heaven so it speaks of heavenly things. For Mount Sion is so called from the word *speculando*,[111] and whoever rests on it is superior to earthly things and sets his sights on heavenly things, desiring them alone. He who accomplished the works of the Father[112] in all matters did not just do what is right but also did what is right for us, as the Apostle says: 'For he was made our righteousness,'[113] since we did not have our own righteousness nor were we able to, just as we are unable even now to possess a righteousness of our own.

So far we have applied this psalm to the person of Christ. Nor is it absurd to interpret it as referring to the heavenly life,[114] for there too is a temple and a tabernacle where a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving is offered without ceasing, as we learn from another psalm: 'Blessed are they that dwell in your house, O Lord; they will praise thee forever.'[115] The Gospel also makes mention of tabernacles when it urges us to make for

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110 Mark 9:23

111 *Speculando* from the Latin verb *speculor*, meaning to watch or keep a lookout. See Jerome *Liber de nominibus Hebraicis* PL 23 (1845) 819.

112 John 10:37

113 1 Cor 1:30

114 Ie anagogically. This is probably an allusion to Pseudo-Jerome *Breviarium in psalmum 14* PL 26 (1845) 853, *vita aeterna*; and to Augustine *Enarratio in psalmum 14* PL 36 143, *habitatio aeterna*.

115 Ps 83:5/84:4

ourselves here 'friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness,'[116] so that they may receive us into the eternal tabernacles when we are forsaken. There, then, stands the temple of God which is pure and holy in all respects, there is Mount Sion on which we shall see the glory of God face to face when the veil is removed;[117] there stands the holy city of Jerusalem;[118] there at last we shall find true rest. However, access to this temple and this palace is gained not by means of religious ceremonies or papal bulls,[119] but by means of a mind purified by faith and with a clear conscience, and by deeds of love which Christ considers are performed for him when they are bestowed on our neighbour.[120]

For the moment, however, I would rather discuss the moral sense, which may perhaps seem less exalted but is in my opinion more useful.[121] The prophet, then, reflects on how great is the majesty of the house of God and how great is the purity of the church which the Lord himself has washed with his blood so that it might be to him a bride without blemish or wrinkle.[122] And seeing, on the other hand, how great is the impurity of mankind, he says: 'Lord, who will reside in your tabernacle? And who will rest on your holy mountain?' Although this passage is particularly applicable to those who hold the principal office in the church of God, who are consecrated to it so that they might minister the word of God to the people and shine before them by the purity of their lives, nevertheless all who have been admitted through baptism and faith to the mystical body of Christ reside in this tabernacle and offer themselves in some way as a living sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God;[123] reigning with Christ they defeat the devil, and by despising the wealth that is stained with mire they find rest in hope of heavenly riches.

Incidentally it should also be noted – although it might not seem a point of any importance – that *ingredi* 'to enter' is not used here in such a way as to conflict with the meaning of *egredi* 'to leave.' This mistake is made,

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116 Luke 16:9
117 2 Cor 3:16
118 Rev 21:2
119 For other attacks by Erasmus on the widespread reliance among Christians on public ceremonies and papal indulgences, see the Introduction to this edition of Erasmus' psalm commentaries in CWE 63 lxx.
120 Matt 25:40
121 Erasmus also expresses his preference for the moral sense in interpreting Scripture at CWE 63 78, 212, and at CWE 64 171.
122 Eph 5:27
123 Rom 12:1; 1 Pet 2:5

however, by those who conclude that we become spotless by our very entry, for entry into the church is gained through baptism; but it is not εἰσέλθει 'he enters' which is written, but πορεύεται 'he progresses,' which is used of one who is moving, advancing, and journeying or walking, as when it is said, in another context, 'Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord.'[124] Even after we have departed from Egypt and rid ourselves of all impurities in the Red Sea, it still remains for us to proceed without stain until we reach that blessed country which God has promised to those who continue steadfastly in his love. For to stand stationary in the way of the Lord is to go backwards. Paul moves forward, he who put the things of the past behind him and strove towards that which stood firm before him.[125] To stand can, however, be something commendable. Thus Paul says, 'Stand firm in the faith by which you have been called,'[126] that is, persevere, not in order to advance towards more perfect things but to stop yourself slipping back into what is inferior. There can also be progress on the path of virtue, as it says in the Psalms: 'I have run the way of your commandments when you enlarged my heart,'[127] and in the Song of Solomon: 'We shall run in the fragrance of your ointments.'[128] And the Apostle says: 'So run that you may obtain.'[129] 'He walks' is said of the man who makes progress, 'he stands' of one who continues steadfastly in goodness, prepared to withstand the snares of the devil, and 'he runs' of the man who with great eagerness and ardour of spirit rushes on towards virtue. And there are similar stages on the path of the wicked. He is called blessed who does not walk in the path of the ungodly: this is the first step towards piety.[130] The second step is not to linger on the path of the sinners who persist in evil. The third is not to sit on the seat of pestilence

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124 Ps 118/119:1. Here Erasmus is directly attacking those who deny the need for cooperation with grace, opponents such as Karlstadt and Luther. See the treatise on free will (*De libero arbitrio* CWE 76 33–6) where he writes: 'nearly the whole of Scripture speaks of nothing but conversion, endeavour, and striving to improve.' In book 2 of *Hyperaspistes* CWE 77 698 he speaks of the collaboration of grace and free will in terms of a process, and at CWE 77 731 he writes: 'grace eggs on nature step by step when it is ... sickly until it arrives at that gift which makes us blessed.'

125 Phil 3:13

126 Cf 1 Cor 16:13; Eph 4:1.

127 Ps 118/119:32

128 Song of Sol 1:3

129 1 Cor 9:24

130 Ps 1:1; the correct reading here would seem to be *pietatem* against the reading of *impietatem* given by ASD V-2 301:468.

with those who glory in evil. The path of the wicked also has a movement of its own. 'Their feet,' it is said, 'run towards evil.'[131] Now there is a useless kind of walking mentioned in Scripture which involves going round and round in circles: 'The wicked walk in a circle.'[132] For while they are driven round and round by their desire for transient things, the more successful they are in obtaining them, the more they seek to obtain, and they are dragged from one desire to another, as for example from a passion for riches to ambition or pleasures, but they never find anything which satisfies them. Do not such people seem to be turning round and round in circles?

And so anyone who wishes to walk without blemish must walk inside the tabernacle, because outside the church even the things which appear impressive are defiled. Heretics and schismatics also fast, pray, sing hymns, give alms, live chastely, preach the word of God, and perform other deeds which have the appearance of virtue. But all these things are but faults because they are performed outside the tabernacle.[133] Those who seek true rest must not depart from the holy mountain of God on which the church is built.

In this one short line the prophet has, in fact, as we mentioned before, summed up all virtue: 'He who walks without sin and does what is right.' A person's first concern should be to free himself from all sin; his next concern, to adorn his life with good works. The former is a matter of faith in the Lord Jesus, the latter a matter of charity which is the companion of true faith.[134] For according to the gospel parable it is not safe to leave a house empty after it has been swept clean: it must be furnished with a variety of good works so that later deeds should not turn out worse than earlier ones.[135] There are some people who lavish extraordinary praise on the power of faith,[136] and they are right in thinking that a great deal may

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131 Prov 1:16

132 Ps 11:9/12:8

133 Cf *In psalmum 85* CWE 64 16 and n25. Erasmus did not always express such a harsh attitude towards those outside the visible ranks of the church: in the colloquy *Convivium religiosum*, eg, he coined the famous parodical phrase, 'St Socrates, pray for us' (CWE 39 194 and n215), and he speaks of the souls of Virgil and Horace as blessed; see also Ep 1390 where Erasmus expresses his hopes for Cicero's salvation.

134 On the relation of faith and charity, see also *De concordia* 202 above.

135 Matt 12:43–5; Luke 11:24–6

136 Erasmus is probably referring to Luther, who often emphasized the prime importance of faith, eg in his work *Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen* (1520).

be attributed to faith. But it is not without reason that in so many passages of Scripture good works are recommended to us in such strong terms.[137] Scripture calls every fault a blemish: this blemish resides principally in the heart and it is the heart which is the root, as it were, from which good works spring. This is the source of all our actions, and if it is of a pure quality, then it gushes forth first in our words, then in our actions. The man who said, 'My heart has poured forth a good word,'[138] had a source of such purity. But if the stream is polluted, it bubbles up in words and deeds which are pernicious, and the spots on the heart erupt like the real scabs which abound on the skin of people whose insides are infected by foul humours. Heresy, for example, is an unsightly blemish, as is distrust; so is hatred of one's neighbour and devotion to money and pleasure. As long as these evils lie hidden in the heart, they corrupt only the person in whom they are contained and do not infect other people so much, but they cannot be concealed for long. When the lurking evil has fixed its roots, it breathes forth harmful words and bursts out in disgraceful actions.

There is only one sin with which we are all infected by contamination from our ancestor Adam. It is in fact appropriate that concupiscence, which we perceive to be deeply ingrained in our flesh, should be referred to as a stain. We see clear traces of this sin even in some babies, as also of jealousy, anger, and a desire for revenge. Although they are unable to express these emotions in words, they do so by crying and making bad-tempered noises and by their facial expressions. So it is not without relevance that St Augustine discusses whether children of this age are corrupted not only by the sin which is termed 'original' but also by that which is known as 'personal' sin or the 'sin of action.'[139]

If this is the case, someone might object, how can it be possible for us to walk without sin, particularly since John the Evangelist, speaking of those who are reborn in Christ, clearly states: 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth of God is not in us'?[140] Indeed, even Paul exclaims: 'O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?'[141] If there is sin in us, how can we be said to be without stain?

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137 See eg Matt 5:16; John 7:3; Col 1:10; 1 Tim 6:18; 2 Pet 1:10.

138 Ps 44:2/45:1

139 Augustine discusses the question of the manifestation of original sin in infants in *Confessions* 1.7 PL 32 593 and *De peccatorum meritis et remissione* 1.35.66–1.37.68 PL 44 147–9.

140 1 John 1:8

141 Rom 7:24

Even good men have faults; otherwise they would not appeal to the Father each day: 'Forgive us our sins, as we forgive them who sin against us.'[142] What person does not frequently offend against God? Or what person does not occasionally cause his neighbour distress? However, such stains in these people are covered by the snow-white fleece of the lamb which is truly spotless, namely Jesus Christ.[143] For there is no condemnation of those who are in Christ Jesus.[144] The Apostle says: 'not in debauchery and immoral behaviour, not in revelling and drunkenness' – there you have the sins; 'but put on the Lord Jesus Christ'[145] – there you have the covering of the sins of human nature. In ourselves we are stained, but in Christ we are without stain as long as we remain in him. And the psalmist calls those men blessed whose sins are covered and to whom the Lord has not imputed sin.[146] Love which covers a multitude of sins is also recommended.[147] I am speaking now of sins which are unavoidable as a result of human weakness. For fornication, drunkenness, debauchery, and similar outrageous acts are indeed effaced once in baptism; but they are not compatible with the fleece of the spotless lamb. Anyone who commits a mortal sin casts off the white robe which he received at his baptism and puts on the black robe of the devil. Nevertheless, those in whom the faith retains its force more easily return to their original innocence, not by baptism but through repentance; for unless they recover their senses, even though they may appear to remain in the tabernacle since they profess the Catholic faith and participate in the sacraments, they do not really dwell in the tabernacle of the Lord. And so the just man who lives in the tabernacle of God and rests on his holy mountain does not stop once he has left Egypt, but with the divine fire shining before him[148] he walks ever spotless towards more perfect things until he arrives at that enduring and unchanging bliss, for which the promised land provides the type.

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142 Instead of the Latin word *dimitte* used in most texts of the Lord's prayer at Matt 6:12, Erasmus writes *remitte*, a controversial emendation which he explains in his edition of the NT and which he defends by reference to Matthew 12, Luke 7, and John 20, as well as to the usage of the Latin Fathers Cyprian and Augustine; see *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: The Gospels* ed Anne Reeve (London 1986) 35.

143 1 Pet 1:19

144 Rom 8:1

145 Rom 13:13–14

146 Ps 31/32:1–2; cf Rom 4:7–8.

147 1 Pet 4:8

148 Exod 13:22

It is the mark of purity to refrain from harming anyone, while it is the mark of love to do good to everybody. That is why the words 'and does what is right' are added. In the Scriptures justice is often spoken of as being not just one of the moral virtues, distinct from wisdom, fortitude, and moderation, but is understood to refer to any good works. It is written: 'I shall not remember all his just deeds,'[149] and in Isaiah it is said: 'your righteousness shall go before you,'[150] just after the prophet has enumerated the duties involved in love of neighbour: 'Share your bread with the hungry,' and so on.[151] Was not Christ's whole life a continuous manifestation of good will to all men? The man who puts on Christ[152] ought, then, as far as he is able, to imitate Christ's perfect kindness as well as his perfect integrity. As St Paul reminds us, 'He who says he abides in Christ ought himself to walk as he walked.'[153]

After giving a summary of all virtue in the one line the prophet passes on to the different kinds of virtue and the names of particular vices. 'He who speaks the truth in his heart and does not slander with his tongue': The tongue plays a very important part in both good deeds and bad. In fact, the mind has a tongue of its own which it uses to address itself and God. From the heart come both life and death:[154] consequently it is a matter of the utmost importance what each man says to himself. For he who lies to himself in his heart cannot speak the truth to his neighbour.[155] By the truth I mean not simply anything contrary to what is false, but whatever is spoken with frankness, honesty, and sincerity. When the Pharisees said to Christ, 'Master, we know that you teach truthfully and that you show no partiality,'[156] what they said was not false, but they were not speaking the truth for they spoke with intent to deceive. And Davus in the pagan comedy deceived by speaking the truth, which is the most wicked kind of

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149 Ezek 18:24
150 Isa 58:8
151 Isa 58:7
152 Gal 3:27
153 Erasmus erroneously attributes this saying to Paul; it actually occurs at 1 John 2:6.
154 Prov 4:23
155 See Chomarat II 1121, where he discusses Erasmus' belief that a lie is defined not by the literal truth of the words spoken but by the intention of the speaker; Erasmus condemns all that is said with a view to harm or destroy someone else. Cf *Ecclesiastes* ASD V-4 42:161: 'Man's speech is a reflection of his soul.'
156 Matt 22:16; Luke 20:21

falsehood.[157] Many people speak to themselves in this way in their hearts, indulging their failings despite the protests of their conscience. But death is at hand to expose the lie, for then such people are tortured and confess that they were not speaking the truth in their hearts before but that they had been seduced by the charm of their own words. This is often the case with those who have obtained remission from all their offences by means of some certificate, or who have obtained a 'justification' (as they call it) for the acquisition of goods by fraud, theft, or violence.[158] But the man who speaks the truth in his heart without deceit, even in a situation of mortal danger, retains his courage as before. The fool who said in his heart 'there is no God'[159] was deceiving himself to his own detriment. Similarly, heretics who are convinced by false doctrines and are led by these to expect peace of mind are deceiving themselves.

In short, all who promise themselves some sort of happiness in this life are not speaking the truth in their hearts. The rich man in the Gospel was deceiving himself when he said, 'My soul, you have ample goods: enjoy them for many years,'[160] for he was forced that very night to give up his life. Anyone who has a proper understanding of the doctrines of faith speaks the truth in his heart; anyone who recognizes that he can achieve nothing by his own powers and that he derives assistance in all matters from the freely given mercy of God, and anyone who acknowledges his sin and prays earnestly for the mercy of the Lord with a pure heart, speaks the truth in his heart. He who utters lies in his heart deceives himself; he who speaks with treacherous intent deceives his neighbour. On the other hand, he who speaks the truth in his heart benefits himself and he whose tongue is free from all deceit profits his neighbour: the one thing follows from the other. How can the man who utters lies in his heart speak the truth to his neighbour? For all wrongdoing is excluded by this one verse, 'He who speaks the truth in his heart,' as is all wrong belief, all wicked and even all idle thought (for whatever is idle is useless). On the other hand, this verse is to be understood as including every pious thought, every pure and chaste desire; similarly all speech which harms one's neighbour is rejected by this short verse. Whatever causes harm to the soul is deceit, but all idle

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157 See Terence *Andria* 4.4; cf Augustine *De mendacio* 14.25 PL 40 505 where it is stated that the worst type of lie is that told in the teaching of the faith.

158 Erasmus seems here to allude to the more extreme abuses of the system of indulgences or pardons.

159 Pss 13/14:1, 52/53:1

160 Luke 12:19

speech, as I said, is also excluded by this verse, for whatever is not useful is harmful. The Lord teaches that our speech should be 'yes, yes' and 'no, no,'[161] in other words, that we should not assert anything which is not true or deny anything except what is false. And Paul advises that our speech should always be gracious, seasoned with salt.[162] He says this so that we should not deceive anyone with lies but should speak the truth among ourselves and to all men.[163] If it is a characteristic of Christian integrity not to deceive even pagans with treacherous talk, should not we Christians be ashamed that there are so few of us who sincerely speak the truth to our neighbour? Are not all the dealings which ordinary people have with one another full of deceit, trickery, and falsehood? How few people there are who do not deceive their neighbour for the sake of some slight profit!

'And does not harm his neighbour': A great deal of mischief is done by the tongue, and from the tongue[164] one moves on to offences for which the tongue acts, as it were, as bawd and procuress. It is however of some merit to stop short without going beyond deceitful speech. You have criticized your neighbour and wounded him with your tongue: do not add to this an injury inflicted by the hands and other limbs. It might appear that it is not particularly commendable to refrain from harming your neighbour but, as I suggested earlier, the opposite interpretation should rather be understood. The just man is said to be the one who has not harmed his neighbour: this means that he has in fact helped his neighbour with every sort of kindness. For anyone who did not act justly when the need and the possibility arose for doing so has harmed his neighbour. In the same way the tongue commits an act of treachery if it does not do its duty whenever charity demands that a favour be done: for example, if you remain silent when you hear your neighbour being exposed to ridicule by an unjust accusation, then you are committing an act of treachery with your tongue. If you do not warn your friend when you see him falling into error, then your tongue has acted deceitfully and by not speaking you are speaking dishonestly. Similarly, if you see your neighbour being unjustly wronged but do not come to his assistance even if you are in a position to do so, you are wronging him. Likewise, if you see your brother tormented by poverty and you do not assist him, despite having sufficient means with which to do so, by not helping him you have robbed him. What you have in abundance you

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161 Matt 5:37
162 Col 4:6
163 Eph 4:25
164 *Lingua*, the reading adopted by ASD, is chosen here instead of that of LB, *longua*.

owe to the man who is oppressed by poverty; what you achieve by inaction is theft and robbery.

Consider whether what follows is not consistent with this interpretation: 'And has not lightly accepted criticism of his neighbour.' You think that you are innocent because you do nothing while others cast abuse and disgrace on your neighbour; however the just man does not only refrain from insulting anyone himself, but also refuses to permit abuse and does not ignore it, if someone insults an innocent man. He who remains silent, pretending to be unaware that his brother has been insulted, is himself insulting his brother. For it is not only the person who is assailed by abuse or whose reputation is sullied who is brought into disrepute, but also anyone who is incited to sin. Those who encourage a man to get drunk bring great disgrace on their friend, and whoever does not remonstrate with the one who is encouraging him – if he has the chance – and does not restrain the one who is invited to drink,[165] has acceded to the attacks to which his neighbour is subjected. He who incites a virgin to commit an immoral act brings great disgrace on himself. He who does not admonish the seducer and warn the girl who is in danger is allowing his neighbour to slide into shame and is making himself the partner of another's crime. However, the thought might occur to someone that, since life is full of men inciting others to vice, if the good man were to try to admonish all of them he would spend all his time doing this and make himself the object of bitter hostility. Sometimes there is an excuse for silence because of the kind of person involved. A son does not sin if he fails to censure his father, nor a boy if he is silent before an older man, nor a low-born man if he does not denounce a ruler. Occasionally, too, the place in question provides an excuse for silence. For example, no one rebukes a man when he is addressing the people in church. To chastise someone in front of many people is more likely to provoke the man at fault than to correct him, especially if there are people present whose respect for the offender's standing ought not to be diminished, as for example if his children or his subjects are there. The philosophy of the gospels also teaches this sort of moderation in rebuke:[166] the first warning ought to be given without any witnesses, the second should admit only two or three, and not until the third time should an account of the matter be laid before the church. Generally speaking, it is right to keep silent whenever there is no hope of reform. Sometimes prayers have the same effect as reproof or a warning. One type of reproof which is avail-

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165 The reading of ASD, *invitatum*, is adopted rather than that of LB, *invocatum*.
166 Matt 18:15–17

able to everyone is for them to indicate by their stern expression that they do not approve of what is being said or done. This is the opposite reaction to that of people who listen with a cheerful expression to someone who is spreading abuse, who applaud indecent stories or smile upon contemptible flatterers or men who are sharp-tongued and offensive in their wit. The just man is utterly averse to such behaviour. 'He surrounds his ears with thorns so that he might not hear the words of those criticizing their neighbour.'[167] Many people enjoy listening to disparaging remarks about their fellow men and think that criticism of others implies praise of themselves. Informers are highly regarded by such people, but the just man shuns and abhors them.

'He regards the wicked man as worthless,' it says. It is a sign of the utmost contempt to consider someone worthless. But spiteful and envious is the man who cannot tolerate his neighbour's good name and who tries to discredit him in every way he can.[168] Such a man is reduced to nothing in various ways, either by being openly despised or by being restrained from slander or cured of his disease by means of salutary rebuke. He is fortunate to be reduced to nothing if he thereby becomes someone who speaks kindly of others instead of slandering them, who gives praise instead of censuring, a person who is guileless rather than envious. Since the just man knows what a plague in life the malicious critic can be, he does not deem him worthy of any respect but shuns and dreads him. 'Under their lips is the poison of vipers; their teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword. Their mouth is full of slander and bitterness. Their wine is the poison of serpents.'[169] What is more terrifying than a monster of this sort? Whenever he makes flattering speeches, he is offering the poison of serpents instead of wine. Even in simply breathing he is exhaling poison. If he bites, his teeth are arrows dipped in poison. If he attacks with his tongue, he slays with a sword. If he opens his lips, he pours forth a serpent's poison, or rather a venom more noxious than a serpent's poison: the serpent's bite only destroys the body, but this poison destroys the soul. Therefore the prophet in terror cries, 'O Lord, deliver my soul from lying lips and a deceitful

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167 Ecclus 28:28 (Latin text); cf Ecclus 28:24 (English translation).

168 See Chomarat II 1120 on Erasmus' vehement condemnation of slanderers in a number of his works.

169 For 'under their lips is the poison of vipers' and 'their mouth is full of slander and bitterness,' see Ps 13:3 (in the Vulgate text only), Ps 139:4/140:3, Rom 3:13–14; for 'their teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword,' see Ps 56:5/57:4; for 'their wine is the poison of serpents,' see Deut 32:33.

tongue.'[170] He fears for the soul, not for the body. Even if a snake bite can kill, it at least brings a gentle death which is not in the least painful. For the person who is bitten is lulled to sleep and so free is he from any pain that it is even with some feeling of pleasure that he passes away. But the flatterer causes the cruelest kind of death. His poison is all the more effective if it is concealed beneath a show of good will. For some men are charming to your face but in the company of others, once they have made their companions agree to disclose nothing, they pour forth in private a deadly poison against you. But they are foolish to demand silence of others when they themselves cannot keep silent. They tell one person, then another, and so on until everyone is aware, and what was whispered in secret bursts forth and becomes a public topic of conversation. In hardly any other age has this vice been as prevalent as in our own day; carping criticism is rife and no books are more avidly read than those which are full of slander. And now learning is deprived of its esteem by those who are not afraid to hurl every kind of abuse at anyone. But the just man considers such people utterly despicable for he esteems those who fear the Lord. Anyone who fears the Lord does not insult a man for whom the Lord died: instead he gives him the benefit of the doubt and sincerely praises what is good, and with regard to any offences which have been proved by such clear evidence that they cannot be overlooked, he nevertheless tries to lessen their impact by pleading at least the great force of temptation, if not some other excuse. 'If we had experienced the same temptations,' he says, 'we would have been guilty of worse things.'

It goes on: 'He who swears an oath to his neighbour and does not cheat him.' To cheat someone through perjury is an abominable crime, but to be free from this sin may not seem a very great achievement. However, these words do in fact recommend that faith be kept in all promises, for without faith the whole structure of human society falls apart. It is true that even nowadays those who are convicted of perjury are considered disgraceful, and yet, if one were to pull aside the veil of habit and examine the matter more closely, one would find that perjury abounds in every sphere of Christian life. The abbot swears to the monks, the monks swear to the abbot; the bishop swears to the clergy and the clergy in turn swear to the bishop. The ruler swears to his people and the people in turn to their ruler. He who undertakes the duties of a magistrate swears an oath, and in olden days anyone who entered upon the consulship used to add this dreadful curse to his

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170 Ps 119/120:2. The theme of slander is also discussed at length in *In psalmum 38* 54–69 above, as well as in *Lingua* CWE 29 262–412.

oath: 'I shall pay with my life and that of my family should I intentionally perjure myself.'[171] The judge takes an oath, as does the witness; the theologian swears an oath when he receives his doctor's degree, and finally (for my list cannot be exhaustive) the clerk swears an oath and so does the timber merchant. Go now and find out for me what each man promises in his oath and consider also whether they fulfil everything they have promised: I fear that you will discover a great number of broken promises. But custom[172] has it that such things are not regarded as perjury; it is only the man who denies any knowledge of what was entrusted to him or of money that he owes who is in danger of being condemned for perjury.

Now in cases where an oath is not taken as a guarantee, anyone who undertakes to perform some service swears a tacit oath to his neighbour, and unless he performs it in good faith he is not completely innocent of perjury. For example, a man who undertakes an embassy or the defence of someone in a court case, or who undertakes the instruction of young people in literature and morals, binds himself by an implicit oath, namely by the very undertaking of the business, to perform it in good faith. Anyone who engages to build a house after agreeing on a price is bound by a sense of moral obligation which is taken for granted, even if an oath is not formally taken. The man who undertakes to make a garment, the goldsmith who is engaged to produce a goblet, the driver or sailor who agrees to transport some merchandise – if any of them should act deceitfully, he couples perjury with deceit, even though the agreement was not formulated in these words: 'Do you swear that you will act in good faith?' 'I do.' Nor does it make any difference whether he adds 'I shall pay with my life and that of my family,' for anyone who has knowingly deceived his neighbour has already sacrificed himself. I am aware that the thievishness of builders and

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171 The wording of Erasmus' citation of the ancient consular oath is not a familiar one and his source for it is not clear. Although the phrase *si quid sciens fefellero* is found in many formal Roman oaths (cf Livy 21.45.8, 22.53.11), the use of the verb *devoveo* is surprising, as it is very rarely used with the meaning 'I sacrifice myself,' except in connection with the sacrifice of Decius on behalf of his country (cf Livy 8.9.8). See also *Lingua* CWE 29 332.

172 Erasmus is critical of custom as likely to encourage empty performance and moral corruption. In *Adagia* IV i 1 *Dulce bellum inexpertis* CWE 35 399–440 he writes that 'nothing is too wicked or too cruel to win approval if it has the sanction of custom;' cf *In psalmum 22*: 'what was [in Simon Magus] a crime is now a custom' CWE 64 166, and 'those who partake of the sacraments, not from true feeling but as it were out of habit, [are] insufficiently concerned about the spirit' CWE 64 186.

drivers who drink up the wine of others[173] has become a joke, but the judge will not acknowledge these as jokes. The integrity of the Christian ought to be so great that a simple promise should have the weight of an oath. Nor is it only to your neighbour that you must keep your promise but even to your enemies and those who are hostile to our religion, provided that your promise does not involve anything criminal.

The psalm continues: 'He that does not put his money out to usury.' Under the old law it was a detestable offence for a Jew to lend money to another Jew for the purpose of receiving in return something in addition to the original sum, though they were allowed to practise usury with foreigners.[174] Usury is certainly an accursed word among Christians who ought to be united among themselves by closer ties of friendship than the Jews once used to be. I just wish that the business itself was equally accursed. Even the ancient philosophers regarded usury as a terrible thing because it was against nature for money to beget money.[175] But besides this type of usury, 'barefaced' as it is called, how many transactions, occupations, and devices are there today which are so closely related to usury that they are sometimes even more criminal? We employ such practices especially when our neighbour is oppressed by need, in which case he ought to be assisted without our claiming any recompense. The tenant farmer is in need and he thinks he is redeemed for a small sum, but it is arranged in such a way that he has to pay out the same amount of corn every year, whatever the yield of his lands and whatever the price of corn may be. When there is a fear that the crop of corn will be sparse or when a shortage of the bare necessities presses men hard, those who have the corn stored away increase the price. A man who hands out one thousand florins in silver coins as a loan so that as a result of the contract he may receive in return gold coins, which are generally regarded as of greater value, is he not obviously practising usury? Even those who arrange for the value of money to rise or fall so that they may thereby make a profit are not far from usury. Not even those are exempt from a charge of usury who force their creditors to accept a smaller sum than they lent and then to give the debtors a receipt stating that they have paid their debt in full. But I shall cease my account of such usurious practices for the moment, for they are countless in number, but anyone wishing to dwell in the tabernacle of God must be free from them all.

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173 Erasmus may be remembering his own experience of such deceit, as recounted in Ep 240 which he wrote from Cambridge to his friend Ammonio in 1511.

174 Lev 25:36; Deut 23:19–20

175 Cf Seneca *De beneficiis* 7.10.

Now we could, if you wish, give this passage a broader interpretation in accordance with the moral sense. Money could be interpreted as being every gift of God which can be used to assist one's neighbour. For example, one man has been given the gift of elegant speech, another has been granted learning and the ability to make sound judgments, another has been given a special aptitude for government, another man is an expert at diplomacy, while another is influential with the common people or with statesmen. He who helps his neighbour without hope of recompense, using the talent which God has granted him, is praised by this saying: 'He that has not put his money out to usury.'

But a difficulty arises at this point because in the Gospels the servant who has not given the money with which he was entrusted to usury is condemned,[176] while it is generally agreed that here it is the man who has not given his money for usurious purposes who is being praised. But there is in fact no contradiction: the Lord loves the usury which brings profit but hates that which his servant arrogates to himself. The man who gains honour and profit for himself from the gift of eloquence is rightly condemned, for the profit belongs to the one who provided the capital. But the man who dispenses the word of God in such a way that many people are inflamed with a love of God and God is glorified among them practises a laudable form of usury.[177] This is applicable in other ways too: the righteous man directs all God's gifts to his neighbour's advantage because he recognizes that the talent with which he helps others is a product of God's generosity. He attempts, at least as far as he is able, to invest God's money wisely, but so as not to gain any praise or human advantage from it he offers all the profit to him who lent the capital. You may say, 'does one therefore have to work without recompense?' and 'does the workman not deserve his wages?' Yes, indeed, but no one will receive a richer reward than he who bestows the gifts of God on others without asking for anything in return. Anyone who lends his money at interest to God has a generous debtor. Moreover, the words spoken by the Apostle, 'the labourer deserves his reward,'[178] are not

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176 Matt 25:15–30; Luke 19:20–6

177 Cf the definition of a theologian given by Erasmus in the *Ratio verae theologiae*: 'The chief aim of the theologian must be to set forth the holy Scriptures wisely, to give an explanation of the faith rather than of useless quibbles, to speak about Christian behaviour seriously and effectively, and to draw forth tears and inflame souls with a desire for heavenly things' (Holborn 193:19–22).

178 1 Tim 5:18

addressed to those who administer the gifts of God but to those who are aided by their administration. It is for them to share their material benefits with those from whom they receive spiritual advantages.[179] A reliable manager will certainly receive things from those whom he has treated well, though not everything, of course, nor in all places nor from all men: he will not demand what is as it were owed to him but will await his reward from the Lord for whom he is doing business, just as St Paul must be believed to have occasionally accepted things offered spontaneously by others although he did not accept them from the Corinthians:[180] certainly we do not read that he demanded anything from anyone at all. No one is more likely to receive recompense for treating his neighbour well than the man who does good to him without asking for anything in return.

Now what follows may appear to be of little merit: 'He who does not accept a bribe at the expense of the innocent.' Even the pagans considered despicable anyone who accepted a bribe to condemn someone who was not guilty or who received money to incriminate an innocent person through false testimony, or any advocate who, for the sake of profit, defended a guilty person against someone whom he knew to be innocent. For the prosecutor used to clear himself of calumny under oath, while the advocate used to take an oath as to his good faith. If only this practice were not so frequently detected among Christians! This statement can of course be given a wider application: anyone who, for the sake of some benefit to himself, does not assist an innocent person when he has the opportunity to do so, accepts a bribe against the innocent. For example, if you see your neighbour being wronged and you pretend not to notice in order to oblige someone or other, then you are accepting a bribe against the innocent. If a man reflects thus, 'if I defend this person, his oppressor will withdraw his assistance although up to now he has been generous to me,' then the benefits which he usually receives are a bribe taken against the innocent.

'He who does these things will not be moved.' It says 'he who does,' not 'he who says.' God rejects those who honour him only with their lips.[181] The Pharisee who understood correctly which commandment was the most important in the Law heard these words from the Lord: 'Do this and you will live.'[182] 'He who does these things.' What things are these? To walk without blemish, to do what is right, to speak the truth in one's heart, and

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179 1 Cor 9:11
180 2 Cor 11:8–9
181 Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8; Mark 7:6
182 Luke 10:28

all the other things which he enumerated. For they are all connected, and if any one of them is lacking then the rest are invalidated. Now what reward awaits the man who manifests these virtues? 'He will never be moved.' These words can be interpreted in two ways: either he will never be driven back or, if he is driven back for the time being, he will not be subdued for ever but will rise again after his fall and will be reconciled with God. Just as he who trusts in the Lord will not feel ashamed for ever but may perhaps for the moment suffer humiliation from his fellow men, so he who lives with due devotion in the tabernacle and rests upon the holy mountain of God will not be subdued for ever. This is also borne out by the words of another psalm: 'He who trusts in the Lord is like Mount Sion and he who lives in Jerusalem will not be moved.'[183] 'The city of our strength,' says Isaiah, 'is Sion; a saviour will be placed in her as a wall and a rampart.'[184] This is the one city about which the Lord declared: 'And the gates of hell will not prevail against it.'[185]

In this psalm, however, all outward forms of veneration of God which are not combined with true inner piety are condemned, as is all knowledge or learning which is combined with corrupt behaviour. Jeremiah discusses this judgment in his seventh chapter: 'Stand in the gate of the Lord's house and proclaim there this word. Say: "Hear the word of the Lord, all ye of Judah, who enter through these gates to worship the Lord"; thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your endeavours and I will abide with you in this place." Do not put your trust in lying words, saying: "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord." For if you have amended your ways and your doings, and if you execute justice between a man and his neighbour, if you do not bring false accusations against the stranger or the orphan or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place and do not follow alien gods to your detriment, I will abide with you in this place, in the land which I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.'[186] And a bit later: 'Has this house in which my name is invoked become a den of robbers in your eyes?'[187] You see that in these lines, as in the following ones, the Lord is enraged with those who used to put their trust in the temple and in the temple rites although their hearts and lives were stained by sin: for such men do not purify the temple, rather they pollute it.

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183 Ps 124/125:1
184 Isa 26:1
185 Matt 16:18
186 Jer 7:2–7
187 Jer 7:11

Isaiah treats this same topic more outspokenly and more sternly in his first chapter; there God rages thus against those who used to venerate him by means of temple rites, although in other respects they led morally corrupt lives: 'What use to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams and I do not want the fat of well-fed animals or the blood of bullocks or lambs or goats. When you come before me, who has asked for these things from your hands, that you should walk in my halls? Do not offer more sacrifices to no purpose. Incense is hateful to me; I cannot bear the celebration of the new moon or the sabbath or the other festivities. Your meetings are wicked. My soul hates your new moons and your religious festivals: they have become a burden to me,'[188] and so on. Might not a stupid people which rebels against God reply to this, what has happened to you, Lord? Now you say, who has asked for these things from your hands? although the law which you gave us through Moses prescribes all these things so precisely and promises great rewards to those who observe them and threatens those who violate them with death. Now incense is hateful to you, although you used to call it the fragrance of sweetness. Now your soul hates feast days in which you used to enjoy participating. What is the reason for such a great change in one who alone remains immutable?

What should God answer those who murmur against him? I am indeed immutable, but you are not keeping my commandments and I did not ordain those forms of worship in such a way that you should place supreme hope or confidence in them, but so that they should act partly as signs by which you would be admonished and partly as a means of support which would bring you to true piety. If piety is lacking, then everything else is useless; in fact, these rituals are so far from finding favour with me that they actually provoke me to anger. The Law is spiritual and demands works of charity, together with purity of mind; unless works are included, however much the outward forms of worship are maintained, the Law is violated and whatever you do is hypocrisy.[189] What is it then, they may say, that you demand of us in particular? 'Wash yourselves,' he says 'and be clean.'[190] This is evidently what the psalm means when it says: 'He who walks without sin.' 'Put away the evil of your thoughts from my eyes.'[191] This psalm says the same thing: 'He who speaks the truth in his heart';

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188 Isa 1:11–14
189 Rom 7:14; Gal 5:6; James 2:17–19
190 Isa 1:16
191 Isa 1:16

'Seek justice, help the oppressed, defend the orphan, protect the widow';[192] the psalm expresses this as: 'He who does what is right.'

In chapter 58 of Isaiah the same people murmur against God, saying, 'Why have we fasted and you have not heeded us? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have taken no notice?'[193] But what do the people hear from the Lord? 'Is it such a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to abase himself? Is it to bow his head like a reed and to lie down in sackcloth and ashes? Is this what you call a fast and a day which is acceptable to the Lord?' Now what outward action, I ask you, will find favour with God if he is not impressed by fasting performed in sackcloth and ashes? Was it not by fasting in this way that the Ninevites, Achab, and a great many others turned the Lord's anger into pity?[194] Fasting is not in itself displeasing to God but it pleases him only when it is accompanied by purity of mind and works of charity. Therefore Isaiah continues: 'Undo the bonds of wickedness, loosen the oppressive loads, set free those who have been crushed, and break every yoke. Share your bread with the hungry and bring the poor and homeless into your house. When you see someone naked, cover him, and do not despise your own flesh. Then your light will break forth as the morning and your health will quickly come forth; your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the Lord will protect you. Then you will call out and the Lord will hear you; you will shout and he will say to you, "Behold, I am here because I the Lord your God am merciful."'[195]

The prophet then continues along the same lines at greater length. The Lord is merciful and he therefore takes especial delight in the offering of mercy. Christ encourages this in the Gospel: 'Be perfect as your Father is perfect.'[196] Perfect in what way? By treating everyone well without discrimination. 'Who makes his sun to rise over the good and evil and sends rain on the just and unjust alike,' he says.[197] He is also in agreement with the prophet when he says: 'Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy and not a sacrifice."'[198] The word mercy embraces all the works of love. Where are they told to come from and to go to so as to learn this? From superstition to true piety, from the letter of the Law to the spirit. Is God then

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192 Isa 1:17
193 Isa 58:3
194 Jon 3:5 (Ninevites); 3 Kings/1 Kings 21:27 (Achab)
195 Isa 58:6–9; cf Deut 4:31; Exod 22:27.
196 Matt 5:48
197 Matt 5:45
198 Matt 9:13

displeased if we offer sacrifices? Not at all, but he disdains the offerings which are bereft of mercy and approves that the prescribed forms of worship be neglected if a neighbour's needs demand immediate assistance. 'The sabbath was made for man,' he says, 'and not man for the sabbath.'[199] However, not even the works performed out of love for our neighbour are pleasing to God unless they proceed from a sincere heart, that is, with faith and pure love of God, and of our neighbour for God's sake. Faith is responsible for making you believe that whatever you bestow on your neighbour you are giving to God and that from him alone should you await a reward for your good deeds. Love causes you to assist your neighbour gladly and eagerly. But if you have in view the honour you may gain from your fellow men or the transitory profit which will accrue to you, then this is not mercy but a business transaction.

It is true that these things are particularly applicable to the Jews who made righteousness virtually dependent on outward forms and who sought a reputation for piety among men rather than with God. It is their superstitious practices which the Lord often exposed in the Gospel.[200] But we must constantly consider whether this also applies to us, for although we do not sacrifice animals, we do still have forms of worship and rites which give a marvellous impression of piety, and some people perhaps rely on these things and do not trouble themselves about purity of mind. Some adorn a place of worship at great expense, erect altars, build monasteries, but at the same time they refuse to give their needy neighbour what they owe him and do not make restoration of their ill-gotten gains or change their wicked ways. And yet they are still satisfied with themselves as if they deserved well of God because they have performed an act of great goodness and they are anxious to see themselves portrayed in pictures and sculptures in the churches, adding an inscription with their names. I fear that God may say to these people also: 'who has required these things from your hands, that you should walk in my halls?'[201] and that you should fill the church and my altars with your inscriptions and portraits?

One man believes that he has attained the heights of piety if he pays for masses to be celebrated regularly at a specific place and on certain days; another, if he pays for matins to be chanted to the Virgin Mother with organ accompaniment and singing and for praises to be sung to her also at vespers, accompanied by the most melodious harmonies produced by singing

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199 Mark 2:27
200 On Erasmus' attitude to Judaism, see CWE 63 xlix–lvi.
201 Isa 1:12

and organs and even trumpets,[202] even though the churches in any case often resound with the singing of psalms, hymns, and prayers. Unless this is done with a pure mind and in a spirit of forgiveness, is there not a danger that such people will be told: 'And when you cry out to me, I shall not heed you?'[203]

What then? Should we disregard the outward forms of worship? Not at all. But we should restore them from superstition to piety, from extravagant and unnecessary expense to Christian moderation, and we must be particularly careful to make the kind of offerings which are especially pleasing to God. What are these offerings? A mind made pure through faith and innocence and prepared by love to treat everyone well. 'These things,' says the Lord, 'you ought to do, without neglecting the others.'[204] These are the things you ought to do according to the words of the psalm, when it says: 'he who does these things.' These are the things which of their own accord commend us to God, even if we cannot do other things without being at fault. For example, the church has enjoined a fast; you keep the fast but still do not abstain from pleasures or from anger – in fact you are more prone to revenge than usual. So your fast is displeasing to God who calls to you: 'Is it such a fast that I have chosen?'[205] You have neglected what you ought to have done and you have done what you ought to have neglected.[206] You celebrate the mass but you bear a grudge against your neighbour: be aware that your offering is displeasing to God. You cry to God 'mercy, mercy, mercy,' but you yourself show no mercy to your brother. You pray that God may deliver you from danger although you refuse to help your neighbour when he is in danger. And so all those of us who profess the name of Christ and wish to be counted as his members, so that he may dwell with due devotion in his tabernacle and find rest on his holy mountain, must reject all evil. Thus we may also walk without blame in his sight and be united in truth, sharing a single purpose.[207] For sin is not absent where discord

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202 Erasmus is vehement in his attack on the use of musical instruments in church: *Annotationes in 1 Cor* 14 ASD VI-8 276:185–278:210 and *Modus orandi Deum* CWE 70 149. See Margolin 48–55. On self-promotion through patronage in churches, see Michael Baxandall *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven and London 1980) chapter 3 especially 82.

203 Ezek 8:18; Prov 1:28

204 Matt 23:23; Luke 11:42

205 Isa 58:5

206 Erasmus' text appears to contain a superfluous *non* in all Latin editions: 'praetermisisti quod oportuit facere, et fecisti quod oportuit (non) omittere.'

207 Eg Rom 15:6; 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 2:2

is present: there can be no truth in a heart where there are conflicting beliefs, and no honesty in a person's speech where there is disagreement on points of doctrine. So let us then offer ourselves every day as pleasing offerings to him who offered himself for us: thus we may truly become the true priesthood. At the same time let us fight courageously against the devil that we may truly be a royal race. Let us keep ourselves free from all defilements of the flesh that we may be a holy nation.[208] Recognize, O Christian, your dignity and take pride in it, not a pride based on merits, as that writer puts it,[209] but a pride granted by heaven. Trample beneath your feet what is unworthy of your high status. It is you I am talking to, whether you are a man or a woman, child or old man, rich or poor, high- or low-born, king or peasant, to you, lastly, whether you are a weaver or a fuller, for if you have been reborn in Christ you are a king, you are a priest, you are blessed. To defeat the devil is a true sign of kingship; to put to death what is earthly[210] in you is a true mark of the priesthood; to remain undefiled by any wrong-doing is truly saintly.

Lawyers apply the word 'sacred' [*sancta*] to whatever it is a capital offence to violate, like the walls or gates of a city, the senate, and such things. They apply the word 'consecrated' [*sacra*] to whatever is dedicated to any divine power, and they use the word 'holy' [*religiosa*] for those things which we refrain from defacing out of some kind of fear, as in the case of the tombs of the dead.[211] But these terms are all applicable to you as a Christian. You have been buried with Christ in baptism and you have died to the world:[212] you are violating your sanctity if you hand your tomb over to the world to be demolished. You have been consecrated to the Holy Trinity and have been made the temple of the Holy Spirit. 'If anyone defiles the temple of God,' says Paul, 'God will destroy him,'[213] but it is defiled by all the corruption which the Spirit, being a lover of purity, abominates. If you are a shoemaker or a fuller, the temple of the Holy

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208 1 Pet 2:9

209 Erasmus is here referring, in a specifically Christian context, to the words of Horace *Odes* 3.30.14–15: 'take the pride so well earned.'

210 Col 3:5

211 On the legal distinction between *res sacre* (things dedicated to the supramundane divinities), *res religiosae* (eg burial places), and *res sanctae* (profane things placed under divine protection), see Gaius' *Institutes* 2.2–8, and the *Digest* 1.8 and *Institutes* 2.1.7–9 of Justinian. See also Chomarat I 703–4 on this distinction in the context of Erasmus' other works.

212 Rom 6:4; Col 2:12; Gal 6:14

213 1 Cor 3:17

Spirit is not sullied by the dirt of the leather or by the soap, but is polluted by pride, immorality, anger, greed, and similar impurities of the soul. That to which reverence is due must also have solitude and peace. It is wrong to use what has been consecrated for other purposes. It is an offence to violate what is sacred. So he who has been buried with Christ and has died to the world is behaving blasphemously if he is quite torn apart by worldly cares and does not allow his soul to enjoy its rest. All our limbs, in fact our whole person, has been consecrated to Christ once and for all. Anyone who uses his bodily organs or his mental faculties for any purpose other than the glory of God or his neighbour's benefit is guilty of sacrilege. 'You were bought at a price,' says the Apostle, 'and you are not your own.'[214] And similarly he says: 'Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them the members of a prostitute?'[215] The Bible does not make much distinction between the terms *sacra* and *sancta*. Anything which used to be performed in the temple of Solomon in days of old, or is performed nowadays, too, in the form of outward rituals, is accomplished spiritually within each of us; indeed, it is accomplished all the more excellently and powerfully because it occurs spiritually, because it takes place within, in the most important part of a man, and because it occurs as a result of divine grace. The words which were spoken to the priests: 'You shall be holy because I the Lord your God am holy,'[216] are directed to all of us. Not only was Aaron himself consecrated but so were his robes and all the vessels of the temple.[217] Not one of the priests had the audacity to dare to make use of anything for domestic purposes. How much more scrupulously must we ensure that we do not seize upon anything consecrated for a divine purpose and put it to a use which is disgraceful, if not sacrilegious. The vessels of our temple are every one of our members, all our mental faculties; the robes are our actions, by which we are adorned to the glory of God. You may marvel at the temple built of white marble, glittering with jewels and gold, but you are a more precious temple.[218] You walk with awe in the church which the bishop has consecrated by anointing it, but you are more holy. You have not been anointed with priestly oil. What of it? Even Christ had never been anointed with the oil of Moses although he is the king of kings and a priest

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214 1 Cor 6:19–20
215 1 Cor 6:15
216 Lev 11:44, 19:2; 1 Pet 1:16
217 Exod 30:26–30
218 1 Cor 6:19, 2 Cor 6:16

for ever.[219] Your head and hands have not been smeared with the oil which is prepared by drugsellers, but the whole of you has been anointed with the blood of the spotless lamb, Jesus Christ. The person whose heart has been anointed with the oil of the Spirit has been anointed auspiciously. However, you do not lack an outward anointing either, for you have been anointed in baptism, anointed in the sacrament of confirmation: the former for priesthood, the latter for battle. (Once people used to be baptized with plain water; the anointing with oil was then added on the authority of the Fathers.) The Lord cries out through the prophet: 'Do not touch my anointed ones,' and John says: 'His anointing will teach you about everything':[220] here he is addressing not only the priests but all who have been consecrated to Christ.

Therefore let each of us ensure that he is pure and that he makes pure offerings in his temple, that he is chaste and that he renders chaste offerings. 'What offerings?' you may ask. He who has checked the flood of lust within him has slaughtered a splendid goat to the Lord and at the same time has inflicted a fatal wound on his enemy, Satan. He who has driven all jealous passions from his heart has offered up a welcome sacrifice. He who has suppressed his seething anger has sacrificed a lion. He who has rid himself of folly and ignorance has sacrificed a sheep. He who in times of affliction submits himself completely to the divine will has offered a most pleasing sacrifice. He who restrains his insolence slaughters a calf. He who abandons deceit and adopts an honest approach sacrifices a fox. He who makes up for his extravagant ways with sober behaviour has sacrificed a pig. He who learns not to indulge in foolish chatter has sacrificed a magpie. For in this type of sacrifice some kind of animal is sacrificed in every case, either one which bears the characteristics of a certain vice or one which symbolizes some virtue.[221] For example, anyone who lives chastely with his lawful wife offers a pair of turtle doves to the Lord; anyone who sighs with longing for the heavenly life and adopts an attitude of candour in all things has offered a pair of doves. For one should offer to the Lord both

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219 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14, 19:16; Heb 7:3

220 Ps 104/105:15; 1 John 2:27

221 On the literary use of animals as symbols of vices and virtues, see Morton Bloomfield *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan 1952) passim. Cf *Enchiridion* CWE 66 71: 'If you are still subject to anger, ambition, greed, pleasure, and envy, even if you touch the altar, you are still far from the sacrifice. Christ was slain for you; offer these animals to him as sacrificial victims'; and *Ratio verae theologiae* Holborn 265 12–14. Here, however, apart from the mention of anger, Erasmus is concerned with less than deadly sins.

the vices one has overcome and the virtues one has acquired, for without his help neither achievement would be possible. Those who live their lives in such a way that men who see their good works may glorify the Father who is in heaven[222] burn incense of the sweetest fragrance to him; just as St Paul writes, 'We are to God a sweet perfume in every place.'[223] Indeed, the prayers and thanksgivings of the pure render to God a perfume more pleasing than any incense, myrrh, or galbanum. There is a sacrifice of praise by which God loves to be honoured; a sacrifice of justice which he demands from us;[224] and a sacrifice of mercy by which we appeal to the Lord's mercy. He who helps the poor for Christ's sake and pardons the sinner has made an offering to the Lord which is of great value. And if, according to the Apostle's advice, we continually sing to the Lord in our hearts with hymns and spiritual songs, this music will surpass that of all musical instruments. And so with these sacrifices, this kind of incense, this form of offering, and these kinds of songs,[225] let us continually offer sacrifices to the Lord; with his help let us also fight against Satan so that we may be conveyed from this tabernacle[226] to the heavenly tabernacle to reign with Christ, to whom be glory and thanksgiving for ever. Amen.

VALEDICTORY LETTER[227]

Here you have what you asked for, Christoph, my beloved friend in Christ, a token of our friendship, albeit a small one (at least as far as my contribution is concerned). But I have provided a wise man with the opportunity to become wiser, for with the talents you possess this little commentary of mine will provide the stimulus, and the prophet's words will lead you to ponder more sublime matters. May the Lord keep you safe, together with your excellent wife and sweetest children.

Basel, 2 January 1536

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222 Matt 5:16
223 2 Cor 2:14–15
224 Pss 4:6/4:5, 49/50:23, 50:21/51:19
225 Eph 5:19; cf Augustine *De civitate Dei* 10.5 PL 41 282: 'the visible sacrifice is a sacrament of the invisible sacrifice; in other words, it is a sacred sign.'
226 Erasmus may be modelling his closing lines on Pseudo-Jerome *Breviarium in psalmum 14* PL 26 (1845) 856: 'He will deserve to possess the heavenly tabernacle in Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom is honour and glory together with the eternal Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.'
227 The valedictory letter is Ep 3081.

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WORKS FREQUENTLY CITED

SHORT-TITLE FORMS FOR ERASMUS' WORKS

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This list provides bibliographical information for works referred to in short-title form in this volume. For Erasmus' writings, see the short-title list on 272–6.

Allen	*Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* ed P.S. Allen, H.M. Allen, and H.W. Garrod (Oxford 1906–58) 11 vols and index
ASD	*Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* (Amsterdam 1969–)
BHR	*Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*
Bietenholz *History and Biography*	Peter G. Bietenholz *History and Biography in the Work of Erasmus of Rotterdam* (Geneva 1966)
Bietenholz *Radical Erasmus*	Peter G. Bietenholz *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus* (Toronto 2009)
CCL	*Corpus Christianorum*, series Latina (Turnhout 1954–)
CEBR	*Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation* ed Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher (Toronto 1985–7) 3 vols
Chomarat	Jacques Chomarat *Grammaire et rhétorique chez Érasme* (Paris 1981) 2 vols
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (Vienna and Leipzig 1866–)
CWE	*Collected Works of Erasmus* (Toronto 1974–)
Duffy	E. Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London 1992)
ERSY	*Erasmus of Rotterdam Society Yearbook*
Gordon	Walter M. Gordon *Humanist Play and Belief: The Seriocomic Art of Desiderius Erasmus* (Toronto 1990)
Holborn	*Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus: Ausgewählte Werke* ed Hajo Holborn and Annemarie Holborn (Munich 1933; repr 1964)
Jedin	Hubert Jedin *A History of the Council of Trent* (English trans Edinburgh 1957–61) 2 vols

LB	*Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami opera omnia* ed J. Leclerc (Leiden 1703–6) 10 vols
Margolin	J.-C. Margolin *Érasme et la musique* (Paris 1965)
Pabel *Erasmus' Vision*	*Erasmus' Vision of the Church* ed Hilmar M. Pabel, Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 33 (Kirksville, MO 1995)
Payne	John B. Payne *Erasmus: His Theology of the Sacraments* (Richmond 1970)
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus ... series Graeca* ed J.-P. Migne (Paris 1857–66) 162 vols
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus ... series Latina* ed J.-P. Migne (Paris 1844–55, 1862–65; repr Turnhout) 221 vols. In references to later editions or reprints of PL volumes in which the column numbers differ from those in the first edition the date of the edition is cited.
RQ	*Renaissance Quarterly*
Screech	M.A. Screech *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly* (London 1980)
Scrinium Erasmianum	*Scrinium Erasmianum: Mélanges historiques publiés ... à l'occasion du cinquième centenaire de la naissance d'Érasme* ed J. Coppens (Leiden 1969) 2 vols
Turchetti 'Une question mal posée'	M. Turchetti, 'Une question mal posée: Érasme et la tolérance. L'idée de sygkatabasis' *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 53 (1991) 379–95
Williams	G.H. Williams *The Radical Reformation* 3rd ed (Kirksville, MO 1992)

SHORT-TITLE FORMS FOR ERASMUS' WORKS

Titles following colons are longer versions of the same, or are alternative titles. Items entirely enclosed in square brackets are of doubtful authorship. For abbreviations, see Works Frequently Cited.

Acta: Acta Academiae Lovaniensis contra Lutherum *Opuscula* / CWE 71
Adagia: Adagiorum chiliades 1508, etc (Adagiorum collectanea for the primitive form, when required) LB II / ASD II-1–8 / CWE 30–6
Admonitio adversus mendacium: Admonitio adversus mendacium et obtrectationem LB X
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Apologia ad Fabrum: Apologia ad Iacobum Fabrum Stapulensem LB IX / ASD IX-3 / CWE 83
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Apologia adversus Stunicae Blasphemiae: Apologia adversus libellum Stunicae cui titulum fecit Blasphemiae et impietates Erasmi LB IX
Apologia contra Latomi dialogum: Apologia contra Iacobi Latomi dialogum de tribus linguis LB IX / CWE 71
Apologia de 'In principio erat sermo' LB IX
Apologia de laude matrimonii: Apologia pro declamatione de laude matrimonii LB IX / CWE 71
Apologia de loco 'Omnes quidem': Apologia de loco 'Omnes quidem resurgemus' LB IX
Apologia qua respondet invectivis Lei: Apologia qua respondet duabus invectivis Eduardi Lei *Opuscula* / ASD IX-4 / CWE 72
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Axiomata pro causa Lutheri: Axiomata pro causa Martini Lutheri *Opuscula* CWE 71

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Colloquia LB I / ASD I-3 / CWE 39–40
Compendium vitae Allen I / CWE 4
Conflictus: Conflictus Thaliae et Barbariei LB I
[Consilium: Consilium cuiusdam ex animo cupientis esse consultum] *Opuscula* / CWE 71

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De constructione: De constructione octo partium orationis, or Syntaxis LB I / ASD I-4
De contemptu mundi: Epistola de contemptu mundi LB V / ASD V-1 / CWE 66
De copia: De duplici copia verborum ac rerum LB I / ASD I-6 / CWE 24
De esu carnium: Epistola apologetica ad Christophorum episcopum Basiliensem de interdicto esu carnium LB IX / ASD IX-1
De immensa Dei misericordia: Concio de immensa Dei misericordia LB V / CWE 70
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Dilutio: Dilutio eorum quae Iodocus Clithoveus scripsit adversus declamationem suasoriam matrimonii / *Dilutio eorum quae Iodocus Clithoveus scripsit* ed Émile V. Telle (Paris 1968) / CWE 83

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